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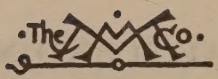
IN
THE VIKING AGE



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TOWNS AND AREAS
OF
SCANDINAVIAN INFLUENCE

SOCIAL SCANDINAVIA IN THE VIKING AGE

BY

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TO

MY SISTERS AND BROTHERS

Chattels die; kinsmen pass away;
One dies oneself;
But good report never dies
From the man that gained it.

THE GUEST'S WISDOM.

PREFACE

It is hoped that this book may be of service not only to the serious student of history and allied subjects but also to the general reader who desires to learn more about a people who for a long period played a leading and unique part in European history, and who, to an extent rarely realized, made, directly and indirectly, a lasting contribution to the cultural development of Europe and America.

The literary sources drawn upon in the preparation of the volume are listed in the Bibliography at the end of the book. Considerable attention was also given to an examination of the relics to be found in the archaeological museums of Scandinavia.

So far as the confusion caused by the World War permitted, permission has been secured for the reproduction of illustrations; and in all cases proper acknowledgment has been given. The quotations at the heads of the chapters are, for the most part, selections from English translations of the sagas and eddas.

I feel deep obligation to the many kind and courteous ones who gave ready aid towards the preparation of the book. This includes members of museum and library staffs, whose names in some cases were never known but whose services are not forgotten. Special acknowledgments are due to the late Professor Gabriel Gustafson of the University of Christiania and to Mr. Halldór Hermannsson, curator of the Fiske Icelandic Collection of Cornell University. Through the kindness of Professor Gustafson, while in Christiania I had the oppor-

tunity to examine the contents of the Oseberg ship,—which throw much light upon Scandinavian culture during the Viking Age,—though they were not yet ready for public exhibition; and during the periods when I worked at Cornell, gathering material from books in the Fiske Icelandic Collection, Mr. Hermannsson placed his extensive bibliographical knowledge at my service and extended aid in innumerable other ways.

When the book was in manuscript large portions of it were read and helpfully criticized by two friends at Goucher College—Dr. Mary Emma Armstrong, of the Latin department, and Dr. Ella Lonn, a colleague in the history department.

M. W. W.

Baltimore, Maryland,
February 26, 1920.

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SOCIAL SCANDINAVIA IN THE VIKING AGE

CHAPTER I

THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

The Dani and Sueones and the other peoples beyond Dania are called by the Frankish historians Normans, whilst however the Romans similarly call them Hyperboreans, of whom Martianus Capella speaks with much praise. . . . When one has passed beyond the islands of the Danes a new world opens in Sueonia and Nordmannia, which are two kingdoms of wide extent in the north, and hitherto almost unknown to our world. Of them the learned king of the Danes told me that Nordmannia can scarcely be traversed in a month, and Sueonia not easily in two. . . . On the borderland of the Sueones or Nordmanni on the north live the Scritefini, who are said to outrun the wild beasts in their running.

Adam of Bremen.

Greater Scandinavia

THE people of Scandinavian stock, during the surprising activity characterizing them from the close of the eighth century to the middle of the eleventh, spread far beyond the limits of their early base in northwestern Europe. In the New World they established themselves on the west coast of Greenland, and for a brief period they abode upon the mainland of North America, in Vinland the Good; eastward, they extended their sway to the heart of the present Russia, and were not without influence even as far as Constantinople, where they formed the bodyguard of the Byzantine emperor; their movements towards the North Pole were arrested only by the barriers of the Arctic climate; in the balmier regions to the south they made many conquests, setting up victorious standards in Normandy on the French coast, in scores of places in the British Isles, in Sicily and Southern Italy, and they even

threatened to gain a foothold in the Iberian Peninsula and Northern Africa, in which places for a short time they occupied territory.[1] Such, broadly speaking, were the remotest frontiers of the ethnic empire of Greater Scandinavia, but with the geographic character of the whole of the territory within the boundaries indicated this chapter is not concerned, for non-Scandinavian peoples influenced to a considerable extent the manners and customs of the Northmen in the border population, though the latter often formed the ruling element. Hence, conditions here were less representative of Scandinavian culture than they were in the original swarming ground—Denmark, Norway, and Sweden—and in Iceland, the first Scandinavian colony of the Viking Age. The population of these ancient lands was chiefly and fundamentally of Scandinavian blood, and the culture was primarily of Northern origin. Since these countries form the theatre in which took place the events producing and reflecting the social characteristics, a glance at their geography should make more comprehensible not only the Northern culture, but also the actors of the drama, the ancient Scandinavians themselves.

Topography

The physical features of the units making up inner Scandinavia vary greatly. Denmark, composed of the attenuated peninsula of Jutland and a group of scattered islands to the eastward, is,—except for the high, rocky island of Bornholm, forming the extreme eastern limit of the Danish archipelago,—rather flat and low-lying, and is marked here and there

[1] The following works treat of the spread of the Northmen during the Viking period: Gjerset, *History of the Norwegian People;* Haskins, *The Normans in European History;* Hovgaard, *Voyages of the Norsemen to America;* Johnson, *Normans in Europe;* Kluchevsky, *A History of Russia;* Larson, *Canute the Great;* Mawrer, *The Vikings;* Nansen, *In Northern Mists.*

by white chalky cliffs suggestive of the coasts of France and England. The great rocky peninsula lying northward shows a broad, gradual incline from the sea and gulf limiting it on the east to the crest of the Scandinavian Alps, at the west of which there is a short, rapid drop to the North Sea. In the rugged mountains on the broadest side of the water-shed, rise the long, crooked rivers which expand into the thousands of lakes characterizing the Swedish landscape. Here and there along the coast of Sweden are occasional good harbors, and beyond them are a few isolated islands, closely bound with the early history of the peninsular mainland. In Norway, on the steeper side of the mountain crest, scarcely a river worthy of the name exists. Instead, there are short, rapid, vestigial streams, often originating in the snow-fields and glaciers high up among the mountains and terminating in the countless cataracts and waterfalls which tumble madly over the lofty cliffs, contributing greatly to the majestic beauty of Norway's fiord-indented coast. These fiords, the sheer-walled "drowned valleys," which give the Norwegian coastline its peculiar character, are very deep, and range from one half mile to two miles in width. Many of the largest penetrate from fifty to a hundred miles into the heart of the peninsula. Near the mouths of the fiords, like sentinels guarding the mainland, stand groups of high, rocky islands. These are in long, narrow archipelagoes, and are especially numerous towards the north. With the arms of the sea thus beckoning to every part of the land and offering safe harbors for the mariner, and with the islands just beyond, to serve as stepping stones outward, it was inevitable that the Norwegians, in particular, should become a great sea-faring people. Iceland, on the other side of the North Sea, has, like Norway, a

generally uneven shoreline, deeply scored by fiords. The coast of the island is, as a whole, fertile, and some productive valleys are found in the interior, but much of the surface is occupied by sand- and lava-deserts, snow-fields, and glacier-mantled mountains. Some of the mountain peaks are active volcanoes, from which, now and then in times past, have poured forth great rivers of lava, burying farms and homes, and permanently devastating large parts of the island. Hekla is the most famous of these, because of the violence of its eruptions, but Mount Askja is the largest. The volcanic character of Iceland explains the presence there of the numerous mud lakes, hot springs, and geysers, which have increased its attractiveness to modern tourists.

Climate

Though much of inner Scandinavia lies close beneath the Arctic Circle, and all of it is well to the north of the parallel marking the southern limits of Labrador, the climate of the region as a whole, thanks to the warm ocean- and air-currents from the equatorial belt, is much kindlier than that of the same latitude elsewhere in the world. This important advantage made possible the comparatively high degree of culture found in these far-northern lands a thousand years ago. The Scandinavia of the past and present is just as truly the result of these benevolent natural influences as Egypt is "the gift of the Nile." But distance from the Pole and elevation above sea-level, as well as other lesser agencies, have made the climate in some parts milder than in others. Southern Sweden and Denmark are cooler in summer and warmer in winter than the northern tier of American states in the Mississippi Valley. In fact, they have a climate very similar to the state of Washington and the Canadian province of British Columbia. Iceland, on the other

hand, and the northern parts of Sweden and Norway have very severe winters, and here for many months there reigns almost continuous night, brightened only by the wan, slant rays of the low-circling sun—when it appears at all—and by the weird splendor of the iridescent *aurora borealis*. But there are compensations in the brief summers. Continuous daylight then reigns in the Far North for several successive weeks; the sun dominates the earth during most of the hours in the twenty-four, scarcely interrupted by the brief, silvery nights formed by the union of twilight and dawn in an ethereal and mystical beauty—nights likely to inspire the visitor, at least for a brief space, with a feeling akin to reverence and awe. At this season the whole vegetable kingdom awakens and responds marvelously to the sun's enchantment. Plants grow with a speed scarcely exceeded in the tropics, and bloom and put forth mature fruit and seed before the deadening winter again closes down. Yet even the climate of Iceland has occasionally in modern times shown striking mildness; and the same variation was not unknown in the olden days, as is evident from the testimony of contemporary accounts, that one winter of the eleventh century was so moderate that it was possible to build houses and fences in January and February.[2] On the other hand, these same ancient records state that in the middle of June of a certain year the snow was so deep and frozen so hard that the men of Iceland went a-foot to attend the summer session of parliament.[3]

A thousand years ago bogs and swamps were more numerous in Scandinavia than now, and the forests were thicker and more extensive. Most of the original fen- and swamp-tracts, particularly those in Denmark and

[2] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 270.
[3] *Ibid.*

Forests and Fens

Sweden, have long since been transformed into fertile fields; while some of the early lakes are now marshes. In the ancient days the woods were in many cases impenetrable because of the heavy undergrowth of shrubbery. Great stretches were overgrown with heather, especially upon the sand-blown peninsula of Jutland; but a larger area of Denmark, southern Sweden, and Norway was also mantled with noble forests of ash and alder, birch, oak, and beech, as well as with representatives of the coniferous evergreens. With the advance towards the north, most of the deciduous trees gradually gave way, in the Norwegian-Swedish peninsula, to the conifers—fir, pine, spruce, and hemlock—such as furnish the abundant lumber supply for Norwegian and Swedish commerce at the present time. Within the borders of the Lapland of to-day, the evergreens disappeared, and almost the only representatives of tree life were the rowan, or mountain ash, with its gay red berries, the birch, little more than a slender switch, and the willow, transformed by the rigorous Arctic climate into a mere trailing vine. In the present Iceland there is scarcely more of forest than in Lapland, and the kinds of growth are the same in the two lands; but at the time when the island was settled by the Norsemen the trees were larger as well as more numerous. The statement in the account of early colonization that the first comers found the land forested "from the mountains to the sea"[4] may be something of an exaggeration, but it is quite clear that the forests of Iceland once covered a much larger area than now. As regards the size of the trees, we have not only the record of the early historians that the forests supplied timber large enough for the

[4] Schönfeld, E. Dagobert, *Der Isländische Bauernhof und sein Betrieb zur Sagazeit*, 3.

building of ships as well as houses;[5] but there is also the testimony of the swamps and bogs of the land. Here have often been found trunks of trees of much greater thickness than those growing in Iceland to-day.[6]

Animal Life

Wild animal life, too, was more abundant in the ancient North. The rivers, lakes, and seas abounded in fish, particularly trout and salmon in the fresh water, and herring and cod in the surrounding ocean. Seals, whales, and walruses, as well as other water mammals, were plentiful, particularly close to the Polar Circle. Foxes and wolves were common throughout Scandinavia; and in the forests of the continental part ranged wild cats, brown bears, common deer, red deer, reindeer, and elks. Small quadrupeds, such as the beaver and the marten, the hare and the squirrel, were also numerous. Polar bears from Greenland occasionally visited Iceland, brought there upon the ice-floes. Hawks and falcons were especially prized among the land birds. Sea-fowl of many species and in great numbers swarmed about the coasts and islands, especially in the north; and of these the eider duck, found about Iceland and on the north and west coasts of Norway, was probably then, as now, the most highly prized.

Pre-Historic Inhabitants

At the close of the eighth century the population of Scandinavia was very much less than now. It is idle to attempt definiteness as to the numbers, but it does not seem probable that the inhabitants of that day were more than a small fraction of the present total of nearly ten millions.[7] It was com-

[5] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 31, 47.

[6] Maurer, Konrad, *Island von seiner ersten Entdeckung bis zum Untergange des Freistaats*, 15.

[7] Professor Alexander Bugge believes that the population of Norway in

posed of various pre-historic elements as well as of the dominant Norse type, generally referred to by scholars as the real Scandinavians. The questions of the affinities and characteristics of the pre-historic peoples, of the order of their migration into the Northern lands, and of their relations to one another, have long puzzled scholars, and upon the answers they are by no means all agreed. The first inhabitants of the land must have entered it in the hoary past, shortly after the glaciers retreated,[8] and it was perhaps they who left the primitive kitchen-middens, or refuse heaps, upon the coasts of Denmark and southern Sweden. Whether these aboriginal peoples moved away, were extirpated by later comers, or merged with them, or whether their descendants are still to be found in the Scandinavian North, a fairly distinguishable type, it seems impossible to determine with certainty.

The Brunette Strain in the Scandinavian Population

There is no doubt, however, that when the Teutonic settlers, who were the ancestors of the present-day blond Scandinavians, arrived they found already established in the land a brunette people less advanced than themselves. These older inhabitants were still in the Old, or Rough, Stone stage of culture,[9] while the invading Teutons used implements and weapons of skillfully chipped and polished stone; and they brought with them various kinds of domestic animals, some of which they probably used in the cultivation of the soil;[10] for before entering the Scandinavian lands they had progressed beyond the status of mere herdsmen. It is not impossible that several invasions

this period was only about a ninth or a tenth as large as it is at present. *Norges Historie*, vol. I, pt. II, p. 221.

[8] Hansen, Andr. M., *Oldtidens Nordmaend*, 2–3.

[9] Keane, A. H., *Man: Past and Present*, 515.

[10] Hansen, *Oldtidens Nordmaend*, 14, and *passim*.

of dark peoples of inferior culture took place between the coming of the first dwellers in the land and the arrival of the immigrants of Teutonic blood. It is the question of the origin and character of these brunette people or peoples which has presented the greatest problem to students of pre-historic man in Scandinavia. Certain scientists hold that they belonged to the somewhat hypothetical Iberian wave of population which swept over Europe in the van of the Celts;[11] others believe that they were representatives of the "Alpine race" of Ripley's classification.[12]

The type which is the subject of discussion was dark of hair and eyes, generally broad-skulled, and of medium, or short, stature. These people were not wiped out by the invading Teutons, but many of them in the southern part,—especially in Denmark where there was little chance for migration,—were conquered and enslaved. Farther north, they were crowded into narrow strips of land along the coast, or were driven into the more heavily forested parts of the interior. The blond new-comers meanwhile helped themselves to the best land in the river valleys and the grass-clad open spaces on the hill slopes, choosing territory which was desirable either for cultivation or for grazing.[13] Throughout Scandinavia, the dark people came in the course of time under the dominion of the Teutonic invaders and adopted their language and their culture. The result was to modify both classes of the population to a considerable extent physically; but, since Nature is fond of reverting to old forms, we may be

[11] Ripley, William Z., *The Races of Europe: a Sociological Study*, 207–208; Olrik, Axel, *Nordisk Aandsliv i Vikingetid og tidlig Middelalder*, 13–14.

[12] Hansen, *Oldtidens Nordmaend*, 127; Ripley, *Races of Europe*, 207–211.

[13] Hansen, *Oldtidens Nordmaend*, 14; Nansen, *In Northern Mists*, I, 209.

sure that the appearance of the pre-historic people conquered by the Scandinavian Teutons is pretty faithfully reflected in the distinctly un-Teutonic looking element in the present population—people of medium height or less, rather stocky of build, broad-skulled, and possessed of dark hair and eyes and regular features. This type is particularly well represented in Denmark, but here and there in the Scandinavian peninsula may also be seen patches of such a population, especially along the southwestern coast of Norway; while on much of the remaining coast and in the river valleys are found the purest representatives of the blond Norse race.[14]

That the brunette strain was not contributed to the Scandinavian continental population by the so-called Iberian race seems quite evident from the fact that the latter was characterized by long skulls. Neither were these early people Celtic in origin, as Nansen suggests,[15] —at least, not fundamentally so—for the true Celts were a tall, blonde people. It is more probable that they belonged to Ripley's short, dark, broad-skulled Alpine race.

Race Mixture in Iceland

The people of Iceland, on the other hand, do display a distinct Iberian strain,[16] presumably the result of immigration from the British Isles. Settlers from these islands antedated the Northern immigrants into Iceland, and some of the earlier population probably remained after the coming of the Scandinavians and intermarried with the latter.[17] But what was doubtless a more important dilution of the Northern blood in Iceland came through the subsequent arrival of Ibero-Celtic peoples from the

[14] Hansen, *Oldtidens Nordmaend*, 118–126; Ripley, *Races of Europe*, 210–211.
[15] *In Northern Mists*, I, 210.
[16] Annandale, Nelson, *The Faroes and Iceland*, 12, 219.
[17] Nansen, *In Northern Mists*, I, 165–167.

islands to the south. Some of these entered the land individually, as free settlers; others immigrated because of marriage into Scandinavian families, settled temporarily in northern Britain or Ireland; while a considerable portion was brought in—particularly from Ireland—as slaves.

The "Finns" of the Sagas

A further ethnical question connected with the early North is the identity of the "Finns" of the Scandinavian peninsula, so frequently mentioned in the sagas. This question does not offer much promise of a definite and conclusive answer, but different scholars have advanced suggestive theories, among which that of Fridtjof Nansen seems the most acceptable. He believes that the Finns and the short, dark, brachycephalic people mentioned above as preceding the Teutons into the North were one and the same. To this sparse, primitive population which they found upon their arrival the blond new-comers attached the name "Finns."[18] These old residents differed from the later arrivals culturally not only in that they were semi-nomadic fishers and hunters but also in the fact that they extensively practiced magic and shamanism—accomplishments probably borrowed from the Mongoloid Ural-Altaic peoples farther to the north.

The "Skridfinns," or Lapps

The western extremity of the Ural-Altaic population bordering Eurasia close under the Arctic Circle is made up of people known to the English-speaking world of to-day as "Lapps." These undersized nomads probably came into the Scandinavian peninsula from a northeastern direction after the opening of the viking period. And when the blond Scandinavians in their northward advance met these second dark, nomadic people, they called them "Finns" also, but

[18] *Ibid.*, 209–210.

to distinguish the far-northern tribes from the other Finns they sometimes referred to the former as "Skridfinns," from their habit of rapid travel upon snowshoes. With the passage of time, the southern Finns, who were doubtless of Aryan stock, amalgamated with the Teutonic Scandinavian population and disappeared as a separate people; but the name Finn continued to be applied to the Ural-Altaic population to the north, and is still so used in Norway, though in Sweden in the early modern time the term "Lapp" began to be employed instead.[19]

The Finns of Finland

The term "Finn" was applied even more extensively and inconsistently by the Northmen, for the inhabitants of the present Finland were also known by the name at an early date. This application may be partially accounted for by the fact that these people spoke a language related to that of the Lapps, and shared various cultural characteristics with them. The similarity of culture even misled modern scientists into thinking that the inhabitants of Finland were, like the Lapps, fundamentally Mongolian; but it now appears established beyond question that they are instead basically a blonde, medium- or long-skulled people, probably akin to the Teutons themselves; and that their language and the other characteristics which led to their being classed with the Mongolian groups of Northern Europe were acquired by borrowing, largely as the result of marriage with their Ural-Altaic neighbors.[20]

The arrival of the Teutons in Scandinavia marks the

[19] *Ibid.*, 226–227.
It was the Lapps, or Skridfinns, to whom Othere referred in mentioning the tribute paid by the Finns of Halogaland in the form of furs and other animal products. See Alfred's *Orosius*, in Pauli, *Life of Alfred the Great*, 251.

[20] Abercromby, John, *The Pre- and Proto-Historic Finns*, I, *passim;* Ripley, *Races of Europe*, 365.

first important geographic separation of the Germanic family and the last racial migration into the Scandinavian North. These last invaders, in all probability, came in more than one installment, and as people to some extent separated by group interests. The Goths of Sweden, for instance, seem to have arrived at a different time from the Swedes, or Suiones, of Tacitus, for whom the country was later named;[21] and for a long period they remained apart, but finally the former were conquered by the latter. The advance guard of the Teutonic invaders seems to have entered first the Danish peninsula and the adjoining islands and settled them, after which they, or subsequent arrivals, occupied southern Sweden; later still, the blonde conquerors mòved farther north in Sweden, making their advance against the earlier inhabitants. Norway, the last of the Scandinavian lands to be settled in prehistoric times, was perhaps largely peopled from Sweden; but it is likely that some contribution was also made by sea, from Jutland and the Danish islands. Though the first entrance into the North by the Scandinavian conquerors was seemingly made by land, by way of Holstein, very likely later invasions by water took place, across the Baltic.[22]

The Blonde Scandinavians

There is great divergence of opinion as to when the Teutons entered Scandinavia; some scholars believe that they came thousands of years before the Christian era,[23] and others, that the invasion took place only a few centuries before Christ. Bremer, an adherent of the latter view, thinks that the separation from the mother Ger-

[21] Hildebrand, Hans, *Svenska Folket under Hedna Tiden*, 98, and *passim*.
[22] *Ibid.*, 98–125.
[23] Keane, A. H., "The Lapps: their Origin, Ethnical Affinities, etc.," in *Jr. Anthrop. Inst.*, XV, 221; Hansen, *Oldtidens Nordmaend*, 19; Montelius, Oscar, *Om våra Förfäders Invandring till Norden*, 15.

manic group could hardly have occurred earlier than 300 B. C., but he admits that it might have come centuries before this time.[24] The opinions of even the most profound scholars are, however, little more than intelligent guesses; and all that we can at present be sure of is that the Teutonic conquerors entered the land far back in the prehistoric age of Scandinavia, centuries—perhaps thousands of years—before the birth of Christ. Indeed, it seems proper to say that the Scandinavians are, in a sense, indigenous to the soil on which they now live; for when their ancestors arrived in the North, they were not possessed of the physical and mental characteristics which distinguish them from other Teutons. These they acquired in their new home, as a result of difference in climate and environment, and of mixture of blood with the earlier inhabitants. Consequently, Scandinavia may properly be called the cradle-land of the blonde Scandinavian type, which greatly outnumbered the more primitive earlier comers and dominated the population as a whole, culturally as well as politically.

Mental Characteristics of the Alpine Type

It may be well to remember that the Caucasian population of Scandinavia still discloses two distinguishable race types, and without doubt they were much more marked one thousand years ago. Not only do physical differences persist, but, according to Axel Olrik,[25] mental and temperamental distinctions are also quite noticeable. In Olrik's opinion, the dark element of the population is more impulsive, envious, brooding, melancholy and religious than the Scandinavian type, and displays more talent for poetry and music; it also shows greater endurance in drudgery; but,—

[24] "Ethnographie," in Pauli, *Grundriss*, III, 789.

[25] *Nordisk Aandsliv i Vikingetid og tidlig Middelalder*, 14.

more conservative and less adaptable than the blonde population,—it is more difficult to organize for the execution of extensive new projects.

The blonde, or Scandinavian, type was looked upon by the Northmen of the viking time—who were representatives of it—as the physical ideal; therefore, its physical characteristics demand particular attention. Though now among the tallest people of the world, the Northmen were probably still taller a thousand years ago, for then they had mixed to a lesser degree with their short neighbors. The heroes of most of the sagas are described as very tall men; and Ibn-Fadlan, the Arabian, described the Scandinavian merchants whom he saw in Russia in the ninth century as "tall as palm trees," and stated that he had never seen larger-bodied people.[26] Large-boned and muscular were they also, and long-limbed and deep-chested. The head was long and the face oval, with strongly chiselled features; the skin was very fair, and generally ruddy, sometimes marked with freckles; invariably, the eyes were light, generally blue, but occasionally gray; and the hair, which was usually soft and sometimes curly, was also fair—flaxen, yellow, red, or light brown.

Physical Characteristics of the Scandinavians

The isolation of the Scandinavian lands, combined with the influence of climate and environment, gave a distinct individualism to the Northmen; the fight against the dark and the cold, and the struggle for existence were deeply wrought into their mental and moral fiber. They were, in consequence, strong-willed and capable of great patience when necessity demanded it; self-reliant, decisive, and inclined to express themselves in actions

Temperament and Character

[26] Ibn-Fadlan, 5.

rather than in words; reserved, especially as regarded their deepest feelings, and little given to wearing their hearts upon their sleeves; serious—almost severe—in their mental outlook, but not melancholy; proud and sensitive, to an unusual degree.

Another and more striking characteristic—also probably the result of environment—was the belief in a severe, relentless Fate. They were fatalists in a very real and practical sense. "There is no good striving against it, for what must be is sure to happen," was the attitude taken towards that which seemed inevitable. But that fatalistic viewpoint by no means dominated the Northmen or made them ambitionless pessimists or cowardly weaklings. On the contrary, it seemed a distinct asset, and offered an incentive to make the most of life, in defiance of all of the supernatural forces leagued against them. In fact, their belief in fatalism caused them to look upon life as a sort of game, into which they plunged with zest. On the field of battle they fought fearlessly; and at sea they faced uncowed the fiercest storms. But in their pursuit of adventure no risk of life, in the usual sense of the term, was recognized by them as involved; however reckless a man might be, he would not be killed unless his death had been decreed by the inscrutable Fates; on the other hand, if he was destined to go, no amount of caution could save him.

Fatalism

Their fatalistic philosophy was perhaps instrumental also in developing the qualities of versatility and adaptability which the Scandinavians possessed to an unusual degree, and which still characterize them. The ability to adjust themselves to new conditions and make the most out of a strange environment modified the effect of their individualism in an interesting manner and

made them unusually successful colonists; for though they relinquished much of their individuality, they retained their influence, and as leaders and organizers and intelligent and coöperative followers they made a lasting impression upon the history of Europe. The same qualities make them desirable naturalized citizens at the present time.

Part of the fatalistic game of life, and a very important part from the sporting Northman's point of view, was to try to acquire honor and fame before the Fates called him hence; and the uncertainty as to when the call would come added excitement to the pursuit. This adventurous attitude towards life also increased the desire for fame and praise, and the wish—which existed to a marked degree among the pagan Scandinavians—to be thought well of by their fellow men. "We have gotten a good report though we die to-day or to-morrow,"[27] was the gratifying thought of the triumphant seeker after popular commendation. The "good report" desired was one which conformed closely with the standards of the period; hence fearlessness and victory in warlike feats were especially exalted. And though the Northmen were, on the whole, a modest people, who frowned upon braggarts, this ambition for reputation occasionally caused some to resort to vain and foolish methods for the purpose of securing attention and exciting remark, such as boasting, rich and extravagant dress, and a foolish display of wealth in connection with entertainments.

Among themselves, the Scandinavians were unusually honest and straightforward; they showed a special contempt for the backbiter, the thief, and the liar, for the traitor and the breaker of oaths.

Honesty

[27] *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, I, 59.

But the reports of foreign chroniclers of the careers of the vikings indicate that the latter by no means always kept their treaties and their oaths of peace, that they repeatedly broke faith. It should be borne in mind, however, that we have not the Scandinavians' side of the story, and that the chroniclers were as a rule Christian monks who had special reason for hating the Northmen, since the latter took particular joy in plundering the churches and monasteries because of the wealth to be found therein. That these men from the North drove hard bargains in foreign lands and that they were quick to see and take advantage of flaws in contracts is quite evident, but it is well to reflect that "breach of faith" is the time-honored accusation of those worsted in a sharp deal. Furthermore, the violation of treaty terms and peace pacts with which they are repeatedly charged by their enemies may usually be explained by the fact that sometimes the money due them was not paid on time, or in full, and sometimes new vikings arrived who were not bound by the terms made by the earlier warriors.[28]

Yet, it is after all true that the Northman, like most other human beings, had one standard of conduct for his dealings with those of his own group—his family and people of his own nation—and quite another for those whom he regarded as outsiders,—foreigners, or absolute enemies. Though it was looked upon as dastardly to sneak into a neighbor's house and rob him of his possessions, plunder and piracy in a wholesale manner in the land of the foreigner, whom he regarded as his legitimate prey, might bring to the Northern warrior the highest honor and praise from his fellow men; to creep upon and take advantage of a sleeping foe, or to

[28] Stefánsson, Jon, "Western Influence on the Earliest Viking Settlers," in *Saga Book* of the Viking Club, V, 288.

strike a man when he was down was contemptible in the home land; but when on their viking raids the Scandinavians followed another code, and were often ferociously cruel, not only to the men, but to the women and children as well, though women and children received special consideration when feuds were raging among those of Northern blood.

The Taking of Human Life

Among themselves, however, the Northmen displayed a very different attitude from the present towards the killing of another in a private quarrel. Just as earnestly as the Christian code of to-day teaches the forgiveness of personal injury and wrong-doing, the pagan standard under which the ancient Northmen lived inculcated the duty of avenging the wrong, particularly if it was murder; and it was considered a deep disgrace to the victim and to his family if the crime was not visited with retribution. The good son's first duty was to avenge his father's death. Generally speaking, there was no stigma attached in the ancient North to the person who killed another—for even in the Christian part of Europe at this time life was held very cheap—unless the act was of a particularly inexcusable and dastardly nature. Quarrels were exceedingly common, for the Northmen were hot-tempered, and their extreme pride and sensitiveness made them quick to resent an insult or a jeer. The community as a whole felt no special aversion towards the one who struck the fatal blow; and the family of the slayer looked upon the matter merely as an unfortunate occurrence, which, unless settlement were made by the payment of damages, would be almost certain to end in a bloody feud. This attitude is identical with that now taken by the mountaineers of Kentucky under similar circumstances.

"Revellings and ale have often brought men grief of

heart, death to some, to some curses,'' [29] is a bit of temperance wisdom from ancient Scandinavia; but it was one thing for an individual to philosophize over the evils of alcoholic beverages, and quite another for a nation to profit by a knowledge of the evil. The Northmen were hard drinkers and given to intemperance. Perhaps most of their feasts terminated in drunken carousals. In all probability, however, the fault was largely restricted to the wealthier classes, for the most intoxicating beverages were usually the most expensive; and in Iceland where most of these drinks, or the ingredients for their manufacture, had to be imported, there was comparatively little intoxication. The same was true of Norway, but to a lesser extent. Perhaps more drunkenness among the population as a whole was to be found in Denmark and southern Sweden, but it seems probable that the merchant and viking classes in all parts of Scandinavia were the hardest drinkers, for to them were intoxicants most accessible. Ibn-Fadlan, in describing the drunken revels of the Northern merchants on the Volga, stated that frequently the drinkers died of intoxication, still holding the drinking horns in their hands. [30] But in spite of what has been said, there is no reason to believe that the Scandinavians were worse, as regards intemperance, than the people of the remainder of Europe at the time; and it is possible that in some parts, as Iceland, they were better.

Drunkenness

Gambling was another fault, but it does not appear to have been very general; neither was it, so far as evidence shows, carried to the excess attributed to the ancient Germans by Tacitus. Betting took

Gambling

[29] *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, I, 43.
[30] Ibn-Fadlan, 11.

place in connection with contests of various sorts, but most of the gambling was perhaps carried on by means of dice-throwing, a practice which came under the condemnation of the laws in some sections in the early Christian period.[31] It is not probable, however, that the actual amount of gambling with dice was greatly reduced in consequence of this legislation, though it was undoubtedly carried on less openly than before.

Sex Immorality

Though sex immorality was common, particularly among the men, it was probably but little more so than in most Christian lands at the present time —only more open and above board. And it was the immorality of a people just emerging from the upper stages of barbarism, not that of a degenerate, besotted civilization. Not till they met it in the South after the opening of the viking period was legalized prostitution known among them;[32] and even in spite of the foreign influence the people as a whole were untouched by the disgusting vice and foul corruption found in the Roman Empire.

It has been asserted that the Scandinavians developed during the viking period a cynical philosophy and a hard spirit of commercialism; and in support of this, certain passages from the literature of the period have been presented.[33] Such faults were, however, by no means general; and that the population was sound and wholesome at the core this same ancient literature attests. The sagas, in particular, describe many beautiful friendships, and give numerous instances of unselfish loyalty, utterly free from thought of personal gain. It is quite true that at the time there was little of humanitarianism

[31] *Guta-Lagh*, 85.
[32] Bugge, Alexander, *Die Wikinger*, 86.
[33] Bugge, *Norges Historie*, vol. I, pt. II, 218–219.

in the present-day sense; that the sick received but slight pity or care, unless they had relatives or friends to whom they were dear;[34] and that the lives of infants and the aged, in particular, were held lightly. But this neglectful attitude was no recent acquisition; there is every reason to believe that further back in time, not a greater, but a lesser, degree of human kindness would have been found, in Scandinavia. And though in the contemporary Christian countries conditions were without doubt better in this regard, it should, nevertheless, be borne in mind that not till the last century did the existing standards of humanitarianism develop.

[34] Ibn-Fadlan, 11.

CHAPTER II

THE TIES OF KINSHIP AND NATIONALITY

Bare is the back of the brotherless.
Saga of Burnt Njal.

THOUGH paternal superiority was shown in many ways in the ancient North, there existed no strong patriarchal organization headed by the father who held the members of the blood-unit together and kept them subordinate to him. On the contrary, the patriarchal system was weak and vague, and the power of the man at the head of the family was by no means unquestioned. And it is not at all certain that the system in its full strength ever really held sway in the Scandinavian lands.[1] But the fact that the father's power was limited appears not to have influenced the ties of kinship, for these were very strong throughout the North. The significance attached to blood-relationship is well indicated by the word "*fraendi,*" signifying "kinsman" in the common Northern tongue of the Viking Age. This usage is peculiar to the Scandinavians; in no other language has the word "friend" assumed this interesting change of meaning. To the Scandinavian of ancient times, his best friend was one bound to him by ties of blood.

The Kindred

In the olden days Scandinavian households were larger than at present; many numbered twenty, thirty, or more members, including parents, married sons, and their chil-

[1] Veblen, Thorstein, B., "The Blond Race and the Aryan Culture," in University of Missouri *Bulletin*, Science Series, vol. II, no. III, p. 51, ff.

dren. Not far away from the ancient ancestral homestead was the family burial mound with its dead, who in many ways still belonged to the family group. The names of these dead were remembered and the new-born children were "called up" after them. This family, united by blood-ties among the living and by memories of the dead, formed, in some respects, a world by itself —a sort of league or confederacy bound together by certain rights and duties. And the fact that pre-historic Scandinavia was little more than a geographical expression, without the protecting arm of a strong government, prolonged the influence of the family tie, in some parts, until far into the Middle Ages.

Sworn-Brotherhood, or Blood-Brotherhood

In those early days of individualism and violence, unhappy was the man without kindred, the man who must stand alone in the world, or must go down alone, defeated by outrageous fortune. The man without brothers was particularly hapless, for the bonds of brotherhood were very close and dear. "Bare is the back of the brotherless," says a proverb of the period. It was undoubtedly this recognition of the need for brothers on the part of the brotherless man which led to the origin of the system of sworn- or blood-brotherhood, by which men, unrelated by birth, formed an artificial fraternal tie by literally mingling their blood in solemn ceremony. During the Viking Age the formal rites marking the new tie were as follows: a piece of turf several feet long was cut on the sides while the ends remained fast to the ground. The strip thus made was raised from the ground,—the ends being still fastened,—and braced up in such a manner as to form an arch, by means of a spear used as a support. This done, the two or more men who wished to unite in voluntary brother-

hood gashed themselves and let their blood mingle together on the fresh earth under the arch. Then, upon their knees, after beseeching all of the gods to bear witness, each swore to avenge any wrong done the other as if they were own brothers. A hand-clasp sealed the ceremony, after which those who had entered the pact passed under the arch of sod.[2] The ties thus formed were as sacred and binding as those of blood-relationship. In the viking period even men having kindred, brothers included, united themselves thus to other families of brothers. Naturally, the selection of one's sworn-brother was in such case determined by the fighting strength of the family with which the union was made, as well as by affection and congeniality of temperament. Such an artificial formation of the ties of brotherhood was not peculiar to ancient Scandinavia, but has existed among many other peoples at the stage where the strength of kindred means much, particularly among the Arabs.

Family Solidarity in Denmark and Sweden

Family solidarity varied in different parts of the North during the early Middle Ages, but it was strongest in Denmark and Sweden, the lands earliest settled. Here, it manifested itself in many ways. The most distinct traces of ancestor worship to be found in the Scandinavian North are connected with the religion of these two countries; and the persistence of the worship was due to the prolonged emphasis of the bond of kindred. As the family lost its earlier solidarity in the late heathen age, ancestor worship degenerated into a common "cult of the dead."[3] But other instances of

[2] *Gisla Saga Surssonar*, 13–14.

[3] Phillpotts, Bertha S., *Kindred and Clan in the Middle Ages and After*, 272–273.

the strength of common blood survived in Denmark and Sweden well down into the Christian time, such as the use of the kinsmen's oath in freeing a man from a charge of crime. In Denmark, this method was used as proof in all laws; and in both countries the oath of twelve kinsmen played an especially important part. If a Dane, for instance, was accused of manslaughter, he could clear himself by taking an oath of innocence, supported by the oaths of eleven of his relatives, selected by the accusing side.[4] In Denmark also, where family solidarity last disappeared, the community of interests was recognized by laws forbidding that quarrels between brothers and sisters over landed property be settled in the courts. Such disputes must be adjusted privately in a sort of family conference, in which "twelve of their best kinsmen" had a part.[5] In some parts of Sweden, relatives of slaves had a right to buy the freedom of the latter, even against the wishes of the owners.[6]

Ancestral Land

Throughout continental Scandinavia, the kindred had certain claims upon ancestral land, called "*oðal* land" in Norway, which must be recognized by the member of the family possessing the soil. If the owner wished to sell the property, he must make the fact known in order that heirs or other relatives might have an opportunity to purchase it, and the land thus be kept in the family. In some parts, even if the land had been sold out of the kindred, the law gave any member the standing right for many years of repurchasing it. No such regulations were found in Iceland because the settlements there were new, and land was comparatively abundant.[7] But in Iceland as well

[4] *Ibid.*, 76, 99.
[5] *Ibid.*, 99.
[6] *Ibid.*, 75–76.
[7] *Ibid.*, 43.

as in Norway,—though seemingly not in the two older countries of Scandinavia,—we find the claims of family recognized by the law requiring that people be responsible for their pauper relatives. A man was bound to support his parents, children, and brothers and sisters, if they were in want and unable to work, even if such an obligation resulted in his going into debt-thralldom; and if his income exceeded a certain minimum, he was required to maintain still more distant kindred.[8]

The strength of blood-ties was also displayed throughout Scandinavia in a very marked manner by the place occupied by the feud. In early pre-historic times, private settlement for injury was the only settlement possible. And among the proud Northmen the code of honor declared that the wrong could be wiped out only by blood-revenge. Consequently, the natural kindred, augmented by relatives-in-law, foster-relatives, and blood-brothers, hunted down all male members of families one member of which had done the wrong. Here was shown the responsibility of the whole kindred. A killing on one side, according to the existing code, called for a counter-killing; and it mattered not who lost his life, so long as it was a member of the enemy family. Thus, in following up the feud, whole kindreds were at times wiped out, and frequently the enmities were handed down for several generations. After a fairly adequate system for the public administration of justice through law courts had developed, the feud still played an important part throughout Scandinavia—just as it does to-day in the mountains of Kentucky and

The Feud

[8] *Ibid.*, 43–45. The customary right, existing during the heathen age, to expose infants, and to put to death, during periods of famine, old people who were dependents seems to have been a survival from very primitive times when kindred responsibility played little part.

Tennessee and in Sicily—because it was by this time strongly entrenched in the traditions of the social organization. And the revenge which kindred tradition looked upon as a sacred duty, the laws of the land, molded by the force of public opinion, recognized as a right. Even after Christianity had become well established in the North, laws acknowledging and regulating the right of blood-revenge were in force.

In Iceland, the feud was especially strong and persistent, presumably because—in consequence of the manner in which the island was settled—the inhabitants were particularly sensitive regarding matters of personal dignity and honor. But, though the feud here displayed such strength, it is of interest to note that even near relatives at times refrained from joining the members of the family in their pursuit of blood-revenge—a result of the early disintegration of family solidarity in Iceland.

Throughout Scandinavia the strength of blood ties was shown also by the laws for the payment of wergeld to a family in compensation for one of its members who had been killed,—a mode of settlement which tended to supplant the feud. Such laws were based upon the assumption that each man represented a certain economic value, was worth a certain amount to his family, the amount varying according to the social class of which he was a member; and if he was killed, in order to preserve peace, satisfactory damages must be paid by the family responsible for the economic loss. But in the matter of the wergeld Denmark and Sweden again show the greater family solidarity; for in these lands the ancient laws for its payment were still in force in the Middle Ages. These laws provided that the sum total to be paid must be made

Wergeld

up by the *whole* kindred of the slayer, and it must be divided among the kindred of the slain, whether all were his regular heirs or not. The amount of money paid and received by each person varied with the degree of relationship. In general, each degree of kinship paid one half less than the one nearer; and, similarly, each degree on the injured side received one half less than the degree nearer. A relative on one side paid to the corresponding relative on the other; grandfather, for example, paid to grandfather. Since the value of the dead man to his family was represented by a fixed sum, if the relatives of the murderer were few, each one must pay so much the more; if many, so much the less. In Sweden, as a rule, the mother's kindred received only half as much of the damages as the father's kindred, a recognition of paternal superiority.[9]

In Norway and Iceland, on the other hand, the manner of apportioning the wergeld in the viking period indicates a distinct break with the traditions of family unity. It was no longer a matter which concerned the distant kindred, but only the heirs—as a rule, parents and children on both sides. Theoretically, under the old system of responsibility, the laws for which were obsolete in Western Scandinavia, the murderer paid nothing towards the damages, for he was supposed to be outlawed and his property confiscated. As a matter of actual fact, in the Iceland of the saga-time, the slayer was the one who most frequently paid the wergeld, and paid it all; for prominent men as a rule settled their troubles out of court. If, for any reason, the slayer did not pay, his heirs did, or the chieftain or priest of his district.[10] In Norway,

[9] *Ibid.*, 68–99.

[10] See below, pp. 298–299. Bertha Phillpotts has shown clearly that the parts of the old laws of Norway and Iceland, called *baugatal* in the latter

the breaking up of the kindred unit had progressed almost as far. The payment and receipt of wergeld were usually matters concerning only the slayer himself, his chieftain, and the immediate heirs on both sides.[11]

Probably the main reason for the weakening of ties binding the larger kindred in Iceland and Norway was migration, especially migration by sea.[12] As was stated in the preceding chapter, some of the early settlers of Norway perhaps came from Denmark; and the spread of population over the Norwegian land, because of the fiord-indented coast, must have been largely by water. This broken-up character of the land, geographically, also made for personal independence among the immigrants, and worked against kinship solidarity. The same forces were influential to a much greater degree in Iceland, because of its isolation in the Atlantic, far from the motherland. To move to Iceland was to cut loose from kindred; for the early settlers, as the records clearly show, rarely brought more than wife and children along, and many single individuals also immigrated. So, in the broad sense of the term, most settlers of Iceland were kinless.[13]

Far back in the pre-historic times,—perhaps before coming into the North,—the Scandinavians developed a group consciousness more comprehensive than that of kindred, but existing with it. This was due to the estab-

country, had become dead letters by the saga-time. *Kindred and Clan*, 11 and *passim*.

[11] Phillpotts, *Kindred and Clan*, 20–67.

[12] *Ibid.*, 35–37, 264–265.

[13] Bertha Phillpotts has shown that migration had the same effect upon family solidarity among the first Teutons who settled in England. Here, as early as the seventh and eighth centuries, when the first light of history was thrown upon their institutions, the influence of kindred ties had been reduced to a minimum. The slight subsequent revival may be attributed to the influence of settlers from Denmark, where kindred solidarity was exceedingly strong. *Kindred and Clan*, 205–245.

lishment of political and military ties binding together a number of kindreds, living generally in a single geographical unit. These politico-military units were at first very small, but with the passage of time they grew by uniting. Such political development resulted from various influences: desire for community harmony; need for protection against adjacent enemy groups; the ambition of strong men, who, from military leaders, became chieftains or petty kings. At the first dawn of the historical period in the Scandinavian North, the largest political units were provinces, which, particularly in Sweden, stood out in a very definite manner, each possessing a distinct group solidarity, as is seen from the provincial laws of the period. To the Westmanlander and Gothlander, for example, other Scandinavians were "foreigners."[14] The various provincial laws for the protection of life and property and defense of honor showed distinct partiality to natives of the province for which they were made.[15]

Political Unity

When, at the opening of the Viking Age, the personal ambition of some of the stronger of the petty kings of the provinces resulted in the unification of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, and the rise of the Scandinavian nations of to-day, a larger group consciousness of a political sort began to grow—though in a shifting manner, because of the long period of national instability—and the Danish Jutlander and Seelander came to feel themselves a little closer to each other, because they lived under the same sovereign and same national laws, than they did to the Swede or the Norwegian or Icelander.

While, during the viking period, the people of the

[14] Phillpotts, *Kindred and Clan*, 70; *Guta-Lagh*, 21.
[15] *Guta-Lagh*, 21 ff. See below, p. 33.

North were growing conscious of the artificial national boundaries recently established about them, and the increasing differences in the character of government and laws within the nations, they also came to recognize, seemingly as never before, the unity of race; they developed a group consciousness which included all of Scandinavian blood who spoke the common tongue of the North. The stimulation to the recognition of this larger grouping came largely from travel in foreign lands, on military or viking enterprises. When thrown into contact with people of different ethnical stock, they saw how much, as Northmen, they had in common. Not only were they bound together by linguistic unity and the consciousness of membership in the same ethnical group, but also by similarity or identity of manners and customs, and—most important of all—of religion; for the fact that they alone of all the Teutonic peoples still clung to the ancestral heathen gods, while virtually all the Europeans with whom they associated when beyond their own borders were adherents of the vastly different Christian faith, was a powerful inducement toward the development of a *Scandinavian* nationality, social and racial in character.

Racial Self-Consciousness

This Scandinavian group consciousness was also indicated in the laws of the various political units of the North, but rather in a comparative than a positive manner. In Iceland, where the feeling for kindred was least strong, and the recent historical connection with continental Scandinavia easily remembered, the feeling for race grouping was, as would be expected, unusually marked. It is noticeable in the laws of the republic concerning the payment of wergeld and the right of prosecution in the case of the killing of one not an Icelander. If a "foreign man" from the three kingdoms where "our tongue" is

spoken (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) is killed in Iceland, runs the law, the relatives are to have the same right of prosecution as the Icelanders themselves; but foreigners not from lands where our tongue is spoken, cannot prosecute except in the case of father, son, or brother, and then only if the murdered man was known in Iceland.[16] This provision might be explained in Iceland as merely a recognition of herself as a Scandinavian colony; but in Sweden whose geography would be expected to incline her to look to the east, and away from the other Scandinavian lands, and thus separate her from them, we find another set of laws showing by an interesting gradation an acknowledgment of racial consciousness extending even to the British Isles. These are in the provincial code of West Gothland, which, ever partial to her own, placed the wergeld for a native West Goth at twenty-one marks; for a Swede, at a little more than thirteen; for a Norwegian or Dane, at nine; and for an Englishman, at six marks.[17]

[16] *Grágás*, III, 171.

[17] Enander, Joh. A., *Våra Fäders sinnelag Fornnordiska Karaktersdrag*, 15.

CHAPTER III

CLASSES OF SOCIETY

Edda a child brought forth:
they with water sprinkled
its swarthy skin
and named it Thrall.
. . . . .
Amma a child brought forth:
they with water sprinkled it,
and called it Karl.
The mother in linen swathed
the ruddy red head;
its eyes twinkled.
. . . . .
Moðir then brought forth a boy:
in silk they wrapped him,
with water sprinkled him,
and named him Jarl.
Light was his hair,
bright his cheeks,
his eyes piercing as a
young serpent's.

Lay of Rig.

WHILE the Northmen loved freedom and were in some respects democratic, no such thing as social equality was to be found among them; an aristocratic system was in force, as has been true of all peoples in the earlier stage of their development. Birth and wealth, as a rule, determined the social stratification; but leadership within a class was accorded to only those really qualified and personally worthy. A leader was chosen on the basis of what he himself could do, not upon the record of his ancestors. Iceland, in particular, emphasized family connections, and even at the present day that nation perhaps pays more attention to genealogical records, and takes more pride in long ancestral lines than any other people in the world. In determining social position, land was the most influential kind of wealth throughout the North, though to a lesser degree in Iceland, where it was more

Aristocratic Character of Society

plentiful, than elsewhere. On the continent, much emphasis was placed on the possession of ancestral land, which, consequently, was highly prized.

In general, each subdivision of society had its place, which it was expected to keep. In the great banqueting halls there were high seats and low, suited to the rank of all comers, those for the most humble being nearest the door; and in the public burying-grounds, introduced after the adoption of Christianity, the nobles were entombed in the most sacred ground, beside the church, and beyond them, outward, were buried the other classes in descending order, the slaves being nearest the wall of the church-yard.[1] The divisions existing in life were thus preserved even after death. Class discrimination was, however, felt most in connection with legal and governmental matters: in determining the amount of wergeld which must be paid if a member of the population was wronged or killed; in the composition of the juries; and in the exercise of legislative and judicial power at the political assemblies. Yet, the social division was one of class, not of caste. People of unequal social grade were occasionally united in legal marriage; and it was possible —and in some cases, quite easy—to rise by other means from a lower social rank to a higher one. In Iceland, where society was more fluid because of the newness of the country, and where wealth was more easily obtained, such class shiftings were less uncommon than upon the continent.

Social Classes

To classify the whole Scandinavian people of the early Middle Ages in one set of social pigeon-holes is impossible, because conditions varied in different parts of the land. Iceland, in particular, showed certain important modifications and

[1] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 391–392.

omissions. Broadly speaking, the continental population may be said to have come under the following headings, some of these in turn being marked by divisions of minor importance: (1) slaves of all sorts; (2) freedmen, composed of ex-slaves and a number of generations of their descendants; (3) *bóendr,* the great landed middle class, ranging from the petty freeholder to the *höldr,* or proud possessor of ancestral soil; (4) nobles, made up in the early times of *hersir,* or patriarchal chieftains, but replaced, after the political unification of the lands, by *lendirmenn,* who were the kings' liegemen; (5) "high-born men," including jarls, who were also the kings' liegemen and superintendents, and the kings themselves and their families.

In Iceland, the first two classes existed with practically the same composition. But among the bóendr there was very little of sub-stratification, since here less importance was attached to the possession of allodial soil; while in the Orkneys and Shetlands this seems to have been emphasized as much as in Norway.[2] Iceland also lacked the noble and "high-born" classes—in the continental sense—since it was a republic during the period considered. The only men in the country who corresponded in any degree to the continental nobles were the district chieftains, or priests, who rather belonged to the upper ranks of the bóendr.

Slavery

Slavery, or thralldom, was very common throughout the North during the period in question, and it is probable that the system was at this time thousands of years old. But it does not seem likely that the slaves ever formed a very large fraction of the population. They were held by only the well-to-

[2] Johnston, A. W., "Orkney and Shetland Historical Notes," in *Saga Book,* vol. VIII, 211–264.

do, or rich, and perhaps not more than twenty or thirty were found, as a rule, even on the largest Scandinavian farms. The ranks of slavery were recruited in several ways: many were born into native thralldom; great numbers were purchased from foreign slave merchants; still others were introduced to compulsory servitude through capture in foreign wars or viking raids, Celts, especially those from Ireland, being the most common bondmen of this class from the west, and Finns and Slavs, from the east; and even free Scandinavians themselves were occasionally enslaved as punishment for debt or for more serious offenses and crimes; or they sold their children for the purpose of wiping out debt; sometimes also a man who found it impossible to support and protect himself voluntarily surrendered his freedom. In Sweden such a voluntary bondman was known as a "gift thrall." [3]

The thralls found in Scandinavia at the opening of the Viking Age were perhaps largely descendants of the part of the population subjugated by the blonde Norse. Most important among these were the short, brunette people already mentioned as having preceded the Teutons into the land. These probably formed the lowest class of bondmen. The subjugated native slaves were later augmented from the northern Finns or Lapps; and there seems good reason to believe that when the Swedes conquered their neighbors, the Goths, they in some cases made slaves of them.[4] But it is not likely that at any time the thralls of Scandinavian blood were numerous, for slavery was not a common punishment for crime, and debt bondage was only temporary, unless the amount owed was equivalent to the value of a slave; moreover,

[3] Eriksen, A. E., "Om Traeldom hos Skandinaverne," in *Nordisk Universitets-Tidskrift* for 1861, no. III, pp. 10–12; no. IV, pp. 84–95.

[4] *Ibid.*, no. IV, p. 84; Bugge, *Norges Historie*, vol. I, pt. II, 227.

a wife could not be committed to slavery for debt without the consent of the family to which she belonged. With the increased activities beyond the seas which characterized the last period of heathendom, however, slavery became more important in the North, because of the more common use of foreign thralls. The bondmen of foreign blood were, not infrequently, people of high birth who held positions of honor in their own lands. In some cases, they were carried off in warring raids merely for the purpose of demanding a heavy ransom; if this was not paid, they became the slaves of their conquerors. The daughters and wives of foreign chieftains or kings, particularly if they were beautiful, were occasionally also taken, to become the slave-mistresses of their captors, or to be sold to others.[5]

Treatment of Slaves

Bondmen in ancient Scandinavia appear to have been treated very much as were the Negro slaves in the United States. The high-spirited Northern people so loved freedom as to have, as a rule, a lively contempt for those who were not in enjoyment of it, even though these latter were in servitude because of no fault of their own. Before the law, slaves were not persons, but property, like livestock; and when they were hopelessly sick or too old to work, they might be turned out to die, like the other domestic animals. In Norway, even after Christianity had been introduced, the thrall who had become too feeble to work might be taken to the church-yard and placed in a grave prepared for him, where he was left to perish. Slaves were perhaps also frequently required to follow their masters and mistresses to their graves, through being put to death on the funeral pyre.[6] The life of the slave was

[5] Eriksen, "Om Traeldom," in *Nordisk Univs.-Tidskr.*, for 1861, no. III, pp. 4, 10.

[6] Bugge, *Norges Historie*, vol. I, pt. II, 238–239. See below, pp. 419–420.

always held lightly, and his master might maim or kill him with impunity—unless the act took place at certain holy periods—but the law required that the killing be publicly announced upon the day on which it took place.[7] If a man killed the bondman of another, he must pay damages, as for other property, and if such payment were made within thirty days, the owner might not seek revenge, unless the slave were put to death to secure revenge on the master. Except in rare cases, no slave might be a witness or take an oath; hence, like the African slave of antebellum days in the United States, he had no rights which the master was bound to respect. A person who was in temporary thralldom for debt was treated like other bondmen, except that he might not be sold or driven to work with blows, unless he were stubborn.[8]

But if the slave was not permitted to enjoy the *rights* of society, he also escaped most of its *duties*. His master was entirely responsible for his actions. All bondmen were exempt from military service, except in the case of a great crisis, in which case free and slave alike must go. If a master violated this law and took his slave to foreign parts for military service, he forfeited his ownership and the man became free, or was confiscated by the king. It was also illegal to sell a slave out of the country, except for crime; but there was nothing to prevent a master from taking his slave abroad as a personal servant or as a cook.[9]

The working hours of the slave were long and hard, and his food, clothing, and housing provisions were of the simplest. But glimpses are given in the sagas of

[7] *Grágás*, III, 189–190.

[8] Eriksen, "Om Traeldom," in *Nordisk Univs.-Tidskr.* for 1861, no. III, 10; IV, 86.

[9] *Ibid.*, no. III, 32–33; no. IV, 87–89, 96.

cheering exceptions to this. The household slaves, as in the case in Negro slavery in the United States, were often well treated and became attached to the family. This was especially true of the men and women who assumed virtually the whole care and training of the children in the homes of the wealthy. These, like the "mammies" in the South, were frequently regarded by the children as second parents. Occasionally, also, thralls were permitted to accumulate property and were given positions of trust. One thrall is mentioned who became adviser of the king, and later rebelled against him.[10]

No prohibition existed against the sale, within the country, of one who was a life-slave; but the sale must take place in a legal manner, and in the presence of witnesses. The price of slaves varied, but it generally ranged from one to three marks of silver (eight to twenty-four ounces). The customary price for a woman was one mark, but three times this amount was not unheard of. In some places, the purchaser was permitted by law to take the slave on trial, with the right of returning him within a certain time, if not satisfied. In the Swedish island of Gotland the time limit for trial was six days. On the seventh day the thrall must be returned or the money for him paid down.[11] In some parts of the North there were fugitive slave laws, which encouraged the apprehension of runaways by offering rewards. In Norway if the slave was captured in the district in which he belonged, the reward was one *eyrir* (one ounce of silver); but if he had fled farther, it was two. When a bondman was hired out by his owner, the temporary master was responsible if the slave lost his life through any evident

[10] *Ibid.*, no. III, 45; Du Chaillu, Paul B., *The Viking Age*, I, 512–513.

[11] Eriksen, "Om Traeldom," in *Nordisk Univs.-Tidskr.* for 1861, no. III, 60; no. IV, 92; *Guta-Lagh*, 67–68.

carelessness on the part of the former. Likewise, if the slave was sent home alone and ran away, the one who had hired him was responsible.[12]

Slaves were permitted to marry, but, as in the United States, marriage ties between them were often ignored by the master for the sake of financial gain, and, in general, sex morals among them were loose. Children of slave parentage on one side had a status which varied with the section and also with circumstances; but generally the law gave them the rank of the mother. In some parts of Sweden, however, children of a marriage between slave and free parents were free; and under the East Gotland law, a master was required to provide for his children begotten by a slave. The Danish laws, on the other hand, declared the child of a slave mother to be a slave, but the father could free it by paying the mother's owner three marks. In Iceland, at least, children of a debtor slave must be reared in slavery.[13]

Children of Slaves

Even in heathen times masters often voluntarily freed their slaves; and the emancipation movement was accelerated by the introduction of Christianity into the North. Many received their freedom in recognition of special service, or deeds of marked heroism; but more escaped from thralldom through their masters giving them part of their time in which to work for themselves, and thus to accumulate money for the purchase of their liberty. The ranks of the freedmen were also considerably augmented,—especially in Sweden,—as a result of the relatives of bondmen supplying the price of liberty. Emancipation

Emancipation

[12] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 35.

[13] Eriksen, "Om Traeldom," in *Nordisk Univs.-Tidskr.* for 1861, no. III, 12, 40, 90; no. IV, 99.

was celebrated and sealed in a formal manner throughout the North. In Norway, a ceremonial banquet, called a "freedom ale," was held by the thrall about to receive his liberty. The details of this were prescribed by law. Throughout the land a certain amount of malt must be used in brewing the ale, and in the north of Norway, slave and master must slaughter a wether for the feast in a ceremonial manner. The master and mistress were guests of honor at the banquet, at which the price of liberty—if this was secured by purchase—was paid down in the presence of witnesses. As the result of custom and law, the price demanded of a slave who gained freedom through his own labor was often very low, in Norway being only a fourth of market value.[14]

If slaves were to be freed by relatives, some laws required that the relatives appear at a specified meeting of the popular assembly, and pay over the purchase money to the master, stating on oath at this time that by so doing they freed the bondman. Such freedmen were, consequently, said to be "freed by money and the oath of relatives."

After the introduction of Christianity, emancipation was solemnized in some parts by means of a religious ceremony. In Iceland, for instance, the man who was to receive his freedom was required to appear at the popular assembly and to swear with his hand upon the cross in the presence of witnesses to keep the laws of the land as did "the man who kept them well." To the chieftain-priest who administered the oath and "led him in the law" he must pay a small fee. But manumission under the auspices of the church appears to have especially characterized Norway, where, through the influence

[14] *Ibid.*, no. III, 54–57; *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 33–212; Wergeland, Agnes Mathilde, *Slavery in Germanic Society during the Middle Ages*, 94

of the new religion, as early as the eleventh century the laws decreed that a slave must be emancipated at Christmastide in every province, each district in the province contributing towards the purchase money. The ceremonies connected with such cases of manumission—and perhaps other cases also—were held in the church. In some instances the priest uttered the formula of manumission after placing a copy of the Gospels upon the head of the thrall; but the proclamation of freedom might be made with the slave seated upon the chest of arms which occupied a place below the master's seat; or the slave might even be permitted to sit in the seat of honor itself.[15]

Freedmen and Leysings

Though the ex-slave was in one manner or another initiated into the non-servile part of society, the complete emancipation of himself and his descendants was a slow and gradual process. The delay was intended, on the one hand, to prevent him and his from becoming a burden upon society or a menace to it; and, on the other, to protect them from designing persons until they were capable of protecting themselves. During the transition stage between the status of the slave and that of the freeman, the ex-thrall was called a *leysing*, or freedman. At times the two words were used interchangeably, but, in general, "freedman" meant one to whom freedom was *given*, while a leysing was an ex-thrall who had redeemed *himself*. Broadly speaking, the latter was freer than the former.[16] The differences were, however, not sufficiently emphasized to make it possible to regard them in a dis-

[15] Eriksen, "Om Traeldom," in *Nordisk Univs.-Tidskr.* for 1861, no. III, 53; no. IV, 90, 92, 100; *Grágás*, III, 190–191; Wergeland, *Slavery in Germanic Society*, 118, 132–133.

[16] Wergeland, *Slavery in Germanic Society*, 133, 143.

cussion of the transition state; consequently, the word "freedman" is here employed to include all ex-bondmen —regardless of how they escaped their bonds—who had not yet entered into the full rights and privileges of freemen.

In some cases, the ex-thrall was required to work for his former owner for a year after being emancipated; if he violated his duty during this time, his master might re-enslave him. At the end of the probation period, if the freedman had found favor in the eyes of his master, he might rise rapidly. But such cases were rare. More frequently, after the initial act of emancipation had taken place, a new relationship lasting for several generations was begun between the freedman's family and the master's family. The tie binding the two was of the nature of wardship, and carried with it various rights and obligations on both sides, which gradually decreased as time passed. The freedman's son, for instance, had more of absolute independence than his father, and took a higher rank in society, as is shown by the higher wergeld which might be demanded for his death. But while the ties between the two were still close, the freedman was, in a sense, a member of the master's family. For this reason many of the prominent settlers of Iceland brought their freedmen out with them; and the same was true of the settlers of the Danelaw in England.[17] For a period, the master's family must supply the freedmen with the necessaries of life, if they could not supply themselves. In view of this obligation, the laws in some parts forbade freedmen or their descendants from marrying without the consent of the head of the family to which they had once been attached as slaves. During the heathen period, if a pair of freed people married

[17] Seebohm, Frederic, *Tribal Custom in Anglo-Saxon Law*, 353.

without securing proper consent and had children who were paupers, the master had a legal right to put the children—if there were two—into an open grave and leave them there until one died,—after which he must take out the other and care for it.[18]

By way of compensation for his responsibilities, the master was the heir of his ex-slave if the latter died without children, and was the next heir after any children that might be born. But as time passed and a more extensive free kindred was formed, any relative could inherit before the master's family. However, the right of inheritance could be long claimed by the master's descendants; in Norway, the right descended "to the ninth knee." Not till nine generations had passed did the master's descendants lose the right to property left by heirless descendants of the ex-slave.[19]

Disappearance of Slavery in Scandinavia

As has been already stated, the introduction of Christianity hastened the complete abolition of slavery throughout Scandinavia. In Norway and Iceland the institution probably disappeared some time in the twelfth century; for slaves are not mentioned in writings of later date. In Denmark, it persisted until much later, probably not dying out until the fourteenth century; while in Sweden, which longest resisted christianization, thralldom survived a little longer still.[20]

Serfdom in Denmark

The cause for the persistence of slavery in Denmark, where Christianity was first introduced in the North, was serfdom, which was brought into the country quite early through feudalism. Hence, slavery and serfdom existed side by side,

[18] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 33.

[19] Seebohm, *Tribal Custom*, 265–267.

[20] Eriksen, "Om Traeldom," in *Nordisk Univs.-Tidskr.* for 1861, IV, 108–109.

and the former was accordingly prolonged. A second bad effect of feudal influence was that it added to the hardships of the freedman, and made it more difficult for him to rise in the social scale. However, serfdom did not extend north of Denmark, and did not even affect the whole of that country, but was restricted to the islands of Seeland, Laaland, Falster, and Moen.[21]

Free Laborers

Economically, the freedmen were generally identified with the free laborers or cottiers, who formed the humblest part of the non-servile population. The former were very limited in number, because of the existence of slavery in the North; and, as it was very easy for them to become cottiers,—which perhaps many of them were in later life,—they were not named separately in classifying the Scandinavian population. Though perhaps most of the free laborers came from the slave class, some were people who had, for one reason or another, failed to succeed economically among the higher ranks of the freemen. Sometimes poor folk of this sort became the servants of well-to-do relatives. A few of the laborers were immigrant foreigners. As this laboring class was entirely free, those who were out of work might travel about from place to place looking for employment. When they did so, like the rest of the free population, for the sake of protection they went armed. Once employed, the laborer was less free to leave an undesirable situation than at the present time, for he was generally hired for a certain period, and in most parts there were laws for the protection of the employer. Such laws allowed the master to whip disobedient or defiant servants. Wages were fairly definitely fixed also, by law or custom, except perhaps in Iceland, where influences already referred to,

[21] *Ibid.*, 92.

made conditions better in many ways for the serving classes. But, on the whole, the free laborers were treated kindly; they had protection under the law against unjust or dishonest masters, and enjoyed, as well, the legal rights of all free people. However, certain political privileges were closed to the free laborer and the cottier in Iceland—most probably elsewhere also—and neither could serve on a jury of neighbors.[22]

Cottiers

The humblest member of society having a dwelling of his own was the cottier, or cottager, called *kotkarl* in Iceland, and *húsmaðr* in Norway. He was perhaps most frequently a freedman, and corresponded closely to the Norwegian *husmand,* or houseman, of the present day. The cottiers formed a fairly large fraction of the population and were tenants of the proud *bóendr.* Their homes were small cots or huts, structures of one room and a loft, furnished in a simple manner. They paid their rent for the small piece of land which they cultivated, either in labor or in kind, and at times also worked for their landlords for wages. During the early Middle Ages this class was in a happier position than it was later, after the humbler part of the population had been ground down by the kings and the nobility; for the Viking Age brought a prosperity to the whole North in which the cottiers had a small share indirectly; and, furthermore, there was nothing to prevent them from trying their fortunes over seas as well as the richer men, for they could go as sailors.

Bóendr or Free-holders

Above the freedmen and the freemen who were mere laborers or cottagers, were the *bóendr,* who formed the great middle class, or backbone, of Scandinavian society. Though some of

[22] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben,* 429–431; "Bóndi," in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary.

the large tenants of farms were classed as bóendr, this was an exceptional use of the term, which was almost exclusively bound up with full ownership of land, and was virtually synonymous with freeholder. Since the population of the Scandinavian North during the early Middle Ages was completely rural, this great body of agriculturalists held a position of dignity and importance. The bóendr had full political and judicial rights, and in the early viking period were proud, liberty-loving people, who did not hesitate to defy kings as well as nobles when their rights were jeopardized. But towards the close of the era, because of the encroachment of the wealthier freeholders, and the oppression of the nobles and the kings, the smaller bóendr were thrust into a less honorable position. Some of them seem to have lost their freeholds entirely; for evidence indicates that during this time many of the smaller, independently-owned lands were merged with the larger estates of the wealthy, made wealthier through trading and viking expeditions.[23] In time, the bóendr also lost some of their liberty. As early as the middle of the tenth century, they were, in Denmark, forced to work on the king's estates and to build castles for him;[24] but farther north they retained a greater degree of their former independence, for Norway, and, to a still lesser degree, Sweden, were scarcely touched by feudal ideas.[25] In consequence of these changes, in Denmark and Norway "*bóndi*" (the singular form of the word) soon became a term of contempt, used with reference to the common, low people, as opposed to the nobles and king; very much as "boor," in

[23] Bugge, *Norges Historie*, vol. I, pt. II, 227–228.

[24] Bugge, Alexander, *Vesterlandenes Indflydelse paa Nordboernes og saerlig Nordmaendenes ydre Kultur, Livesaet, og Samfundforhold i Vikingetiden*, 138.

[25] Lie, Mikael H., *Lensprincipet i Norden*, 55.

England, derived from Anglo-Saxon *gebur,* took on an uncomplimentary meaning. In Sweden, the word seems to have retained its higher meaning much longer, for here the king had less power; and certain provinces long remained practically autonomous. Dalecarlia was the best example of these, and here the peasants even now display a proverbial degree of self-esteem and independence of mind. In Iceland, a republic founded as a protest against royal oppression, there was no lowering of the status of the agricultural freeholders; in the Icelandic sagas the word "bóndi" is frequently used of the most prominent men—poets, priests, law-speakers, and warriors; and the same honorable sense is retained in the island to-day, for the Icelandic bóndi corresponds more closely to the American farmer than to the European peasant.

Othal-bóendr, or Hauldar

The Scandinavians of the continent distinguished between different kinds of freehold, and, consequently, between the freeholders themselves. The owner of othal, or allodial, soil was most honorable of all bóendr, and longest retained his position. The othalmen, to distinguish them from the humbler freeholders, were known as *hauldar* (singular, *höldr*); and corresponded closely to the higher yeomen of Northern England. In the viking time and later, othal land might be acquired in various ways: in payment of wergeld; in return for fostering the child of another; through a sort of feudal inheritance, called *branderfð;* [26] as a grant from the king, —generally in return for special services; by means of

[26] The word literally means "burnt inheritance," and dates back to the heathen time when the bodies of the dead were still burned. It was a kind of clientela, by which a strong and wealthy man gave protection and support to a weaker one while he lived, in return for which he secured full right to inherit the latter's property.

unbroken possession of the land for thirty or more years; or as a result of inheritance from one's forefathers.[27] Most othal soil of the earliest historical period was probably of ancestral origin. The importance of ancestral territory is emphasized by all of the ancient laws of continental Scandinavia,[28] but the term "othal" is peculiar to Norway and to the Shetlands and Orkneys, —which were closely connected with Norway politically —and in these parts of the North genuine othal land was carefully distinguished from soil that was merely ancestral. The former must have been handed down in unbroken succession from father to son for a definite number of generations; Gulathing's Law, the oldest code for Norway, says that it must have belonged to the grandfather's grandfather—or have been handed down in regular order for five generations.[29] The same requirement applied to the Orkneys and Shetlands;[30] but the Frostathing's code, of later date, prescribed only three generations,[31] which appears to indicate that as time passed less importance was attached to ancestral tenure.

Perhaps largely in consequence of the honor attached to the possession of it, family land—particularly othal soil—was the most highly prized possession of the Northman. It was partially inalienable through the laws governing its sale, and was further guarded by the regulations governing inheritance. As a rule women could not inherit it; but in the absence of near male relatives, such territory might "come under the rule of the spindle"

[27] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 91, 249–250; Johnston, "Orkney and Shetland," in *Saga Book*, vol. VIII, pt. II, 211–264.

[28] See pp. 26–27, 426–427.

[29] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 91, 237.

[30] Johnston, "Orkney and Shetland," in *Saga Book*, vol. VIII, pt. II, 211–264.

[31] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 237.

—that is, fall to a woman.[32] But, apparently in the hope of keeping it in the original kindred group, if possible, there were additional laws forbidding a man from selling his wife's land unless he had children by her.[33] The birth of a child definitely cut off all claim to the soil on the part of the wife's relatives, for the child inherited it from the mother, and the father was, in turn, the child's heir.

It is impossible to say what proportion of the bóendr of Norway were hauldar or othalsmen on the eve of Iceland's settlement; but they probably formed a strong minority, and perhaps held the larger part of the freehold soil. It was the attempt of King Harold Hairfair to impose taxes upon their othal land,—which had always been held tax-free, in absolute right,—that caused great numbers from the upper classes of Norwegian society to flee from what they looked upon as tyranny and oppression and to settle in Iceland. Contemporary records of Iceland, however, make no mention of othal, presumably because it was fairly easy for all comers to secure land, and such soil was held in full title. Partly in consequence of this fact, there was less definite stratification in the bóndi class of Iceland than upon the continent; but among the wealthier and more influential freeholders of the island much the same pride of position and love of display was found as existed in the older parts of Scandinavia. This was true not only of the men who held their land by inheritance but also of the wealthier of those who had secured theirs by purchase. These owners of real estate rarely traveled about the country alone, for their importance was largely estimated by the size of their train of followers, made up of freemen,

[32] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 92.

[33] *Valdemar den Andens Jydske Lov*, 54, 56; *Biarköa Rätten*, 2; *Erics Sjellandske Lov*, 30; *Guta-Lagh*, 59–62.

called *húskarlar,* and thralls; hence, such a retinue was a regular establishment with many. Some of the Icelanders had a hundred or more such men about them when they rode through the country.[34] This was more generally true, however, of the *goðar,* or priest-judges of Iceland, than of the other bóendr.

Hersar and Lendirmenn

In the prehistoric early part of the viking period, there was in continental Scandinavia a class of men corresponding somewhat closely to the Icelandic goðar of later date. Since they belonged to the unrecorded past, it is rather difficult to say just what their positions were; but in view of the political character of the time, it seems unlikely that they were vassals of the petty kings. More probably, they were virtually independent local chieftains, holding office by hereditary right or by election. Like the *goði* of Iceland, they administered justice, cared for the temples, and superintended the religious sacrifices;[35] but they were also the local military leaders, and headed the *her,* or host, when it went into battle. There seems to be some connection between these men, called *hersar,* and the *héraðs,* the small territorial divisions early existing in Sweden and Norway; and it is presumable that the chieftains had general administrative authority over these local units.

In the ancient times the hersar evidently came from the higher ranks of the bóendr. However, at the time of Harold Hairfair in Norway a change took place; as the king extended his dominion, the hersar lost much of their independence and became royal liegemen, receiving their land and whatever authority they exercised di-

[34] *Origines Islandicae,* I, 90; II, 396; *Glúma,* 74, 76, 83.

[35] Phillpotts, Bertha S., "Temple Administration and Chieftainship in pre-Christian Norway and Iceland," in *Saga Book,* VIII, 264–285.

rectly from the king, as opposed to the bóendr whose land was freehold and remained so in spite of Harold's attempt to transform it into some sort of tributary holding. For a short time the old name was still used, but soon *lendirmenn,* or landed men, was substituted, as an indication of the change in the chieftains' rank and office. The "landed men" were nobles and were distinctly above the hauldar, but, at first, at least, their dignity was not hereditary. Since they received their *lén,* or fief, and their authority from the king, they were his right-hand men.

Long before the provinces of continental Scandinavia were centralized into nations, a class of men called *jarlar* exercised influence. In some cases they were identical with the higher hersar, but, on the whole, they were more powerful. From their ranks Ruric, the founder of the Russian nation, and Hrolf, the first "duke" of Normandy seem to have come. At home, in many instances, they were sovereign chiefs, having the same power as the petty kings of the time who were their neighbors, and differing from the kings only in name. In the old poetry we find that the kings and jarls were addressed in the same manner; and even as late as the national period, as the sagas prove, the kings treated some of the jarls as their peers.

Jarls

With the political centralization of the North, the jarls as well as the hersar were transformed into liegemen by the kings, and held *léns,* or fiefs, from them. But because of their greater original power they were classed, socially, above the lendirmenn, and, with the kings, were "high-born" men. Greater authority was theirs also, for they acted as special powerful agents or representatives of the kings.

That the Scandinavian system of "landed men" was

copied from the feudal practices in force farther south is patent. Charlemagne's administrative system appears to have furnished the model for the Northern rulers, particularly for Harold Hairfair of Norway.[36] But nowhere during the early Middle Ages did real feudalism exist in the North; at most, it was a mild adaptation. Instead of being given new and greater authority, in consequence of becoming the king's "men," the landirmenn and jarls simply had the power which they already enjoyed adjusted to changed conditions. Harold's jarls had more of a general political, than a military, character; and their positions were not hereditary. The Northern chieftains, through receiving a "fief" from the kings, merely became their officers, or superintendents. In Denmark, it is true, because of German influence, the nobles were more independent; but in no part of the North at this period did a highly developed system of personal service and protection have place, as in the remainder of Europe. The nobles had virtually no claims upon the bóendr, at least in the Scandinavian peninsula, and were not a privileged class in the feudal sense of the term.[37]

Scandinavian Feudalism

Since the kings of the saga period had but recently emerged from the class of sovereign chieftains, they were, even in the early national era, in some respects, merely high-born men, like the jarls; but in the exercise of political power they were in a class by themselves. Yet, the facts that in the prenational time they were permitted to rule only during good behavior, and that for some time after political

Kings

[36] Bugge, *Vesterlandenes Indflydelse*, 122–127.
[37] *Ibid.*, Lie, *Lensprinscipet*, 22–55.

centralization, the royal office was elective, prevented the early Scandinavian kings from acquiring very erroneous ideas as to their own personal superiority over the upper classes within their realms.

They were easily accessible to their own subjects, and also to visitors from neighboring lands. The humble man who felt himself wronged might present his grievance in person; the adventurous warrior from Iceland or from his own dominions could offer his military services in the same manner; had a wandering skald or sagaman a poem to recite or a story to tell for the entertainment of a Northern sovereign, he himself broached the matter to the royal personage; and even the Scandinavian fellow with a polar bear from Greenland, to be offered as a "commercial gift" to the king, was permitted to enter the hall and personally tender his unique bid for royal favor. Partly for the purpose of keeping in close touch with their subjects, but also in order to oversee the administration of their dominions, the Northern kings went on regular circuits through their kingdoms, taking each district in turn. While on such progresses, they were accompanied by a large number of retainers, and it was the duty of their subjects to provide hospitality for the company. The kings' "landed men" had similar rights while upon circuits within the smaller political units which they helped administer. The places of entertainment, the length of stay at each, as well as other matters in this connection, were, however, carefully regulated by law.[38] As a considerable part of the sovereigns' time was taken up in these progresses, much of the financial support of the royal establishment came directly from the subjects. The remainder was made up

[38] See "Veizla" in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary.

from the income from the kings' private estates, tribute paid by conquered chieftains, other direct taxes, monopolies, court fines, and tolls levied upon foreign traders.[39]

[39] See below, pp. 196, 223, 310–312.

CHAPTER IV

INFANCY, CHILDHOOD, AND YOUTH

A son, though late born after his father's death, is better than none. Few road-stones stand by the wayside that were not raised by son for father.

The Guest's Wisdom.

Scandinavian parents of ancient times generally desired and welcomed children; to be without offspring was looked upon as a real calamity, and childless couples prayed to the goddess Freyia. But in the early North,—like in ancient Greece and Rome and present-day China,—parents occasionally voluntarily rid themselves of their children immediately after birth. The baby was placed in an open grave in the woods, or by the roadside, to be devoured by wild beasts, to die from starvation or the effects of the weather, or to be rescued and adopted by a merciful passer-by.

Exposure of Infants

Various considerations moved fathers and mothers to such conduct, but poverty or unwillingness to trouble with the rearing of the infant were perhaps the most usual. Sometimes ill feeling between the husband and the wife was thus visited upon their offspring. Illegitimate children, because of the stigma attached to the mother, were more frequently cast out than those born in wedlock. Occasionally a bad dream or some other superstitious influence resulted in the destruction of the child. In those uncertain times when there was such great need for a strong physique, weakly or deformed

babies were also seldom reared; likewise, girls, since they could not perform military service as well as their brothers, were more frequently exposed than boys. The fact that among many barbarian peoples new-born infants are not thought of as possessing a personality, also helps explain this practice among a people so advanced as the Scandinavians of the viking period.[1] But that the custom had fallen into disrepute by the earliest historic period in the North is evident from the saga statement that though the law permitted parents to cast their children away, "it was thought an evil deed."[2] The attitude of disapproval may have been caused to some extent by pre-historic Christian influence.

But a tenderness of heart and an unwillingness wantonly to destroy life was sometimes indicated in the manner in which the child was exposed. If poverty was the motive forcing parents to cast out their child, they often supplied it with salt pork or other food to suck, wrapped it warmly, and placed it beside the highway in the hope that life might be preserved until it should be found by some one willing to rear it. Similarly, the mother at times saved the life of her child after the father had given instructions for its exposure, by bribing the servant or slave ordered to dispose of it to take the infant to people who would rear it.

The Naming Ceremony

The fate of the new-born baby generally rested with the father, or, in his absence, with the male relative who acted as head of the family; but in some cases the decision was left with the mother. The matter was considered promptly after birth; and if it was decided to rear the child, the latter was washed, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and

[1] Todd, Arthur James, *The Primitive Family as an Educational Agency*, 127.

[2] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 583.

given a name. The naming of an infant was looked upon as giving it a spiritual existence and membership in the family, and to expose it after this was counted as murder.[3] The father, or some other male relative of rank, generally officiated at the naming ceremony. He sprinkled the child with water, signed it with "Thor's holy hammer," and pronounced the name by which it should be known.[4] The resemblance of this heathen ceremony to the ordinance of child-christening in the Christian church is obvious, and there is reason to believe that some of the points possessed in common were due to conscious imitation on the part of the Scandinavians, resulting from early contact with the Christian ceremony in Southern Europe. It seems that originally the placing of the child at its mother's breast was the token that it was to be reared; that after it had taken nourishment it had full right of inheritance, and to kill it was murder. After the intention to rear the child had thus been signified, it was named, and the naming was accompanied with a religious ceremony, not connected with the use of water. Later, in imitation of the Christian practice—but long before the adoption of Christianity—the naming ceremony, in which water was used, was given additional significance, and only shadowy remnants of the importance attached to the child's taking its first nourishment were surviving in the earliest historical time.[5]

According to this view, the heathen child-naming cere-

[3] *Ibid.*, II, 52.

[4] Maurer, Konrad, *Ueber die Wasserweihe des germanischen Heidenthumes*, 1–11.

[5] *Ibid.*, 80, and *passim*. In his monograph Dr. Maurer presented these ideas as part of a fairly well supported theory rather than as established facts; before the hypothesis could be proved, he said, further investigation would have to be made of early child christening in various parts of Europe.

mony, which included sprinkling with water, marked the transition between the pre-historic, purely heathen, rite and the Christian. Be that as it may, this form was in general use in the pagan North in the viking time. And it is probable that the elements which it had in common with Christian baptism made it much easier to substitute the latter, with the formal adoption of the new religion. Yet, some of the ideas peculiar to the heathen form were carried over into Christianity and long survived. According to some laws, only a christened child could inherit or receive the protection of the laws; but, for religious reasons, a person was more severely punished for killing an unchristened child than a christened one.[6] There was an exception made, however, in the early Christian period, in Norway—perhaps in the other Scandinavian countries—in the case of children born so malformed as to be monstrosities. Such infants were not to be baptized but to be taken to the churchyard at once after birth, and left there to die. All other children must be baptized promptly; and if a child was ill and likely not to live, in the absence of a priest, any man might perform the ceremony. If no man was present, a woman was permitted to christen the baby, in continental Scandinavia; but the law of Iceland provided that a boy as young as seven years might officiate, in the absence of a grown man; and even one who was younger, if he knew his *Pater Noster* and *Credo*. Only in the complete absence of any such "man person" could a woman perform the ceremony for her dying child, or for the child of another.[7]

Relatives gave great attention to the selection of the

[6] Maurer, *Wasserweihe*, 37, 71, 75–76.

[7] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 12, 131–132; *Valdemar den Andens Jydske Lov*, 10–12; *Grágás*, IV, 213.

name for a child; and under heathenism more importance was attached to the name than later, though many beliefs connected with it were carried over bodily into the Christian time; and some of them still exist. Only one name was given, but this was very frequently compound, for the Northmen believed that such names would bring good luck and long life, especially if compounded with the name of a god. They also liked similarity of sound in names, and parents occasionally gave two or more of their children names with the same initial, or terminal, syllables, as Einar and Eyjolf, Iarngerd and Valgerd; sometimes real rhyming names, as Vit and Lit, were chosen; and even identical names were borne by children in the same family, distinction being made by means of some special characterizing term. It was very common to give children the names of honored relatives, for the Northmen believed that children would partake of the virtues of the ones whose names they bore. Relatives recently dead, in particular, were thus remembered by their kindred, a custom resulting from a half belief that the spirit of the beloved dead lived again in the little child. Present-day Scandinavians still "call up" deceased members of their families in this manner.

The Choice of a Name

The names of the gods or words of religious significance were always favorites; dozens of compound names combined with the word "Thor" were in use; and to a lesser degree the other heathen deities were honored. In some instances devout parents gave four or five of their children "Thor" names. *Ás,* meaning "god," as well as collective words, like *Regin,* standing for the gods in general, were frequently employed, particularly in names for girls, such as Asgerda and Astrid, Reginleif and Ragnhild. Similarly, words having other religious

significance in the heathen cult found place in compound names, as *Vé,* meaning "holy," in Vébeorn and Vémund —names of boys—and *Alf* and *Dís*—words meaning guardian spirits, and generally found only in girls' names, such as Alfdís and Aldís. After the introduction of Christianity the words "*gud*" (god) and "Christ" were found in name combinations, and during the Roman Catholic period saints' names were numerous; but even this devotion to the new religion failed to obliterate entirely the favorites originating with the old pagan faith; and "Thor" names are still very popular.

Like all peoples living close to nature, the Northmen also liked combinations including the names of natural objects and wild animals; but such names—as Thorstein, Asbeorn, Ulfstan—were much more frequently given to boys than to girls.

Slave children, as well as free, were sprinkled with water and named; but their names do not appear to have differed from those of the free-born, except that Svart, black,—evidently an allusion to the generally darker complexion of the slave class—was common.[8]

Naming-Gifts

Upon the occasion of its naming, the child received gifts from friends and relatives, as was the case also when it cut its first tooth. The former custom still survives throughout the North in the gifts presented by god-parents; and, in Iceland, children are still given teething tokens. The presents offered the children of the wealthy at such times were frequently very valuable, occasionally being in the form of landed property; but jewels and playthings of the precious metals were perhaps more common. A favorite teething gift was a slave infant of the same age

[8] Eriksen, "Om Traeldom," in *Nordisk Univers.-Tidskr.* for 1861, III, 22, 50.

as the wealthy child, whom it was intended to serve as a playmate and attendant.[9]

Surnames were a less important matter than first names and were more subject to change. In general, until a child was grown and had developed characteristics of its own, it was simply designated as the son or daughter of a certain man, as Soti Olaf's son and Unna Mord's daughter;[10] but if the mother outlived the father, the child—especially if quite young—was identified by the name of its mother; and surnames at times indicated other relationships. Such surnames were employed merely as a means of identification, and—especially in the case of men—were often later supplanted by nicknames, which were unusually common among the ancient Northmen, and were as a rule quite apt and significant. They were often derived from occupation or place of residence, but at times also denoted accomplishments and physical and mental characteristics, as the following samples show: Thorfinn Skull-splitter, Mord the Fiddler, Einar Oily-tongue, Thorkel Foul-mouth, Ulf the Squinter, Thore Long-chin, Leif the Lucky, Aud the Haughty, Helga the Fair. The last two are the names of women. Sometimes the old surname and the new were employed impartially, as in the case of Leif the Lucky, known also as Eric's son.

Surnames

If the surname or nickname was conferred in a formal manner, as sometimes happened if it came as the result of some special feat bringing honors with it, friends and relatives bestowed gifts upon the person thus newly dubbed, in imitation of the naming offerings of infancy.

Adoption of children appears to have been practiced to a unique degree among the Scandinavians in olden

[9] *Laxdoela Saga*, 52; Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 284.

[10] In Iceland the surnames of women are still formed thus.

times; and it seems still to take place with unusual frequency in the north of Europe. Frequently the children adopted were the offspring of poor kindred, and their rearing by better-to do relatives was merely the recognition of blood ties, which, as has been shown, were unusually strong in the North; but the children of those not related by blood were also adopted, the most frequent of such cases being the infants rescued from the death by exposure to which they had been abandoned by their parents. But fosterage was even more common in Scandinavia, and was more peculiar to the region, though by no means limited to it, for it was very general among the ancient Celts, particularly the Irish,[11] and is to-day practiced in northern Japan, where the Japanese place their children in the care of the primitive Ainu. In the Scandinavian lands fosterage meant the rearing of children by people not their parents, without the relinquishment of parental rights of ownership and control. Children of the better-to-do were more generally fostered than the offspring of the poor; in fact, poor people could hardly afford to have their children fostered. By fostering the child of another, a man acknowledged his own inferiority to the child's father, but bound his family very closely to the kindred of his foster-child. And because of the value of this artificial tie, sometimes men of wealth who lacked influence, in order to secure protection for themselves and their property, offered child-fosterage to fathers having position and power. In this case, no money compensation was received. Since foster-fatherhood was a sort of homage, people sometimes desired it to wipe out the resentment of powerful men. But occasionally it was offered by an equal, purely

Adoption and Fosterage

11 Maine, Henry Sumner, *Early History of Institutions*, 241.

for friendship's sake. Fosterage was, however, primarily a matter of business between parents who could pay to have their children reared by others, and those who were willing to undertake the task and needed the money. In Iceland, where the law definitely provided for the compensation for such services, the payment was often made in advance, in a lump sum; but if the child failed to have proper care, the money must be returned.[12]

Though at times put in fosterage promptly after birth, children were perhaps more usually kept at home until weaned; and in some instances they were four or five years old before being sent away. In Iceland, they remained in the care of their foster parents until sixteen years of age, unless they became ill, in which case, the law required that they be taken home at once.[13]

Two objects seem to have influenced parents to place the rearing of their children in the hands of others; one was undoubtedly the desire to escape the bother of rearing them themselves; but the primary object, originally, at least, was a more worthy one—to secure the most desirable environment for the child. People among whom the institution of fosterage is found are moved by the belief that discipline, obedience, and respect for elders, as well as knowledge of handicraft and intellectual lore, can best be taught away from home, the reason evidently being that parents are likely to spoil their own children by over-indulging them.[14] In Scandinavia fosterage seems to have been, on the whole, successful; foster parents took careful interest in their charges, and, at times, after they were grown, did more for them than did their own parents.

[12] *Grágás*, IV, 21–22.
[13] *Ibid.*; Wisén, Theodor, *Om Qvinnan i Nordens Forntid*, 10.
[14] Todd, *The Primitive Family*, 222–223.

Care of Children at Home

If the children of the prosperous were to be reared at home, they were generally placed in virtually full charge of a trusted servant or slave, who also was called a foster-mother (*fóstra*) or foster father (*fóstri*). During their earlier years, children of both sexes were under the care of a woman, but when the boys became older they were given into the charge of a man. Between the child and his early nurse close and affectionate ties generally existed, which call to mind the position of the colored "mammy" in the southern United States before the Civil War.[15]

Illegitimate Children

Law and custom varied as to the illegitimate child. If the mother was poor, humble, and helpless, the burden of supporting and rearing it generally rested with her and her parents; but at times the fathers of illegitimate children voluntarily provided for their offspring. This was quite regularly the case if the mother was a mistress, or was bound to the man by some form of irregular marriage. In some parts, as in the island of Gotland, the father, if his fatherhood was proven, could be forced by law to support the illegitimate child.[16]

The laws in Scandinavia made it possible for a father to legitimate natural children, whether slave born or free, but in some parts the consent of his legitimate children must first be obtained, because of the matter of inheritance. The process of legitimatizing suggests the formalities connected with the freeing of a slave. In Norway in heathen times—and very probably throughout the Scandinavian North—there was held a ceremonial banquet, for which, ale from a certain amount of malt

[15] *Laxdoela*, 60; *Glúma*, 36.
[16] *Guta-Lagh*, 42–44.

must be made, and a three-year-old ox be slaughtered. A shoe made from the skin of the right foreleg of the animal, was placed beside the ale vat. At the banquet, the father, or other person who wished to legitimate the child, must place the ox-skin shoe upon his foot, after which, the natural child, the joint heirs, the joint owners of othal land, and other relatives concerned did the same. The guests at the banquet were witnesses, making the ceremony legal and binding.[17] After the banquet had taken place, the new status of the child was probably announced at the next meeting of the local assembly, or *þing*. In any case, after the introduction of Christianity, a man in Denmark who wished an illegitimate child to inherit could take the child before the thing meeting and there acknowledge his fatherhood. This recognition might be made without the consent of the legitimate heirs; but in the island of Seeland the natural son could inherit only half as much land as the legitimate one, and the illegitimate daughter, only one fourth as much land and movable property as the legitimate son and one half as much as the daughter born in wedlock.[18]

Care of the Child

Whether spent at home, in charge of parents or nurse, or at a distance, in regular fosterage, childhood was generally a comfortable, happy time—as comfortable and happy as the financial condition and the intelligence of the parents would permit; for, in the heathen time, it should be remembered, only children who were desired were reared; and, as a result of secret evasion of the laws, this was still the case for a considerable period after the christianization of the North. The cradle occupied a place in the early Scandinavian home, and in it the baby, after being duly

[17] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 29–31.

[18] *Valdemar den Andens Jydske Lov*, 44; *Kong Eriks Sjellandske Lov*, 20.

named and washed and wound up snugly like a mummy in a swaddling cloth, was tucked away. When the child was a few months old, and able to move about to some extent, the primitive swaddling garments were discarded and it was clothed in garments somewhat closely resembling those of its parents.

Toys have been mentioned in connection with naming and teething gifts. The finest of the playthings were made by the skilled workers in metal and wood, and were perhaps very much like those enjoyed by children in the early part of the last century. There is incidental reference in the sagas to such playthings as gold rings and balls for the rich man's child; of small brass copies of animals; and also of toy weapons, with which the little boys played at mimic warfare.[19] Though no mention of dolls appears, there is no doubt but that, even in the most humble homes, the little girls played with these more or less close copies, in miniature, of themselves.

Education

No schools or institutions for formal instruction were in existence in Scandinavia during the early Middle Ages; education was entirely a matter of the home. As a rule, the parents or the nurse were the teachers, but other members of the household, or chance visitors especially skilled in some line were also called upon to give instruction. The general education given the girls aimed primarily to train them in a knowledge of the household arts. Hence, they learned to spin, weave, and dye linen and wool; to sew, knit, and embroider; to scrub and clean, and to wash and smooth the family clothes; to work in the dairy at making butter and cheese, and to prepare and preserve foods in various other ways; to brew and to cook; to supervise the house-

[19] *Origines Islandicae,* II, 479; Kålund, Kr., *Familielivet på Island i den forste Sagaperiode,* 282.

hold and to play the hostess. But though this constituted the most important part of their training, the purely intellectual side was not completely neglected. Some of the girls acquired, by direct instruction and by imitation, a knowledge of runes—how to cut as well as how to read them; and they, as well as the men, could quote proverbs, sing songs, recite poetry, and tell sagas. They also had some knowledge of playing on musical instruments.

Since boys in the warlike viking time had to play a much more important part in life than girls, proportionally greater attention was bestowed upon their instruction. And the most important part of his training was that which made the boy a good fighter. Hence, in the interest of developing a strong, healthy body, great emphasis was laid upon out-door exercise, and the youths of each community contested with one another for the championship in all sorts of physical feats. They learned to run, jump, and wrestle; to display skill in the use of skates, skees, and snowshoes; to swim and row and ride horseback. At a very early age they were taught the use of offensive and defensive weapons, particularly to shoot straight, to thrust with the sword, and to swing the battle ax while defending themselves with the shield. Everything possible was done to make the future defenders of home and family honor expert in these regards.[20]

To a greater degree than his sister, the Scandinavian

[20] Olaus Magnus, writing in the sixteenth century, said of the military training given boys in his day in certain parts of Sweden:—"they will not give their Children any bread unlesse they first hit the mark with an arrow. . . . Wherefore there are some boyes scarce above 12 years old, that are so cunning in shooting, that being commanded to hit the head, breast, or feet of the smallest birds that are very far from them, they will do it infallibly with a shaft." *Compendius History of the Goths, Swedes, & Vandals, and other Northern Nations*, 165.

boy was also instructed in intellectual and social accomplishments. In the case of sons of prominent families, this side of their education was given considerable stress. They not only committed to memory the most important heroic tales and poems handed down from past ages, but were taught the art of poetic composition as well, in order that they might properly sing the praises of contemporary heroes. The art of reading and inscribing runes likewise became theirs, and many acquired a practical knowledge of the laws of the land. They learned how to entertain themselves and others by skill in in-door games and by playing upon various musical instruments. Those who expected to travel abroad, especially the sons of chieftains, learned to speak one or more languages in addition to their Northern speech; the tongues most frequently acquired were probably Latin and Celtic.[21] This linguistic accomplishment was perhaps most emphasized by the Icelanders, who realized their remoteness from the tide of European affairs and hence particularly stressed the desirability of gaining a knowledge of other lands, and of learning how other people lived. In fact, if a man wished to be a person of distinction and respect in Iceland, one or more foreign voyages were necessary. This foreign tour was looked upon as the completion of the youth's formal education. Young men frequently made visits to the different parts of Scandinavia and to England, often in the hope of securing service under the kings; and the more adventurous also undertook long trading and viking journeys which carried them to the remoter parts of the continent, and often resulted in their absence from home for three or more years at a time.[22]

[21] Petersen, N. M., *Haandbog i den gammel-nordisk Geografi*, 106.

[22] Keyser, R., *Private Life of the Old Northmen*, 12–13; Kålund, *Familielivet på Island*, 288–289; *Gunnlaugs Saga Ormstungu.*

In the olden time, Scandinavian children were considered grown up at an earlier age than is now the case. In Iceland, boys scarcely out of babyhood were given adult responsibilities in some respects—as, the right to baptize a dying infant in the absence of an older "man person"; and at the age of twelve they could serve as witnesses in lawsuits; but they must be sixteen before they were considered mature enough to take charge of the prosecution for their father's murder, or before they might consent to the re-marriage of their mothers. In parts of Denmark, the father could not force his sons to remain at home after they had attained their fifteenth birthday, if they wished to take their inheritance from their mother and set up for themselves; but the boys were not allowed to sell their land, if it was ancestral, before they were eighteen. In some provinces of Sweden, however, they were allowed to make sales of land when but fifteen. As a rule, girls must be distinctly older than their brothers before they were permitted to assume the same responsibilities—if these were permitted to them at all; but they entered marriage very young, fourteen years not being an unusual age at which to take this step. In general, it may be said that young people were considered of age at fifteen, but it should be borne in mind that, in consequence of the conditions of the time in which they lived, and of the duties thrust upon them, they were more mature mentally and more capable of playing the part of men and women than would be young people of the same years in the present day.[23]

Coming of Age

[23] *Grâgâs*, III, 37, 167; IV, 28; *Valdemar den Andens Jydske Lov*, 20; *Biarköa Rätten*, 8.

CHAPTER V

DRESS AND ORNAMENT; PERSONAL REFINEMENT

Hallgerda . . . had on a cloak of rich blue woof, and under it a scarlet kirtle, and a silver girdle round her waist. Her hair came down on both sides of her bosom, and she had turned the locks up under her girdle.

Saga of Burnt Njal.

Like the Elizabethan period in England, the Viking Age in the Scandinavian North was one of great prosperity and intense self-consciousness. This condition produced a love of pomp and parade, of color and display—a desire to exhibit one's wealth to the public gaze for the sake of exciting admiration and envy among one's neighbors. Such an object could be gained by means of dress and ornament; hence, we find that all who could afford to do so wore, during leisure and upon festive occasions, gorgeous and elaborately ornamented clothing, and decorated their persons with a great amount and variety of jewelry. Olaf Hauskuld's son is the best example of this love for fine clothes. The sagas tell of his appearance at the meeting of the Icelandic parliament gaily and elaborately clad, and equipped with such splendid weapons that those who beheld the gorgeous display seem, in wondering admiration and envy, to have nicknamed him "Peacock" (*Pá*), and "Olaf Peacock" he remained ever after.[1]

Love of Display in Dress

The materials used for clothing varied according to whether they were intended for the use of the rich or the

[1] Bugge, *Norges Historie*, vol. I, pt. II, 229.

poor; for every-day wear, or for special social gatherings. Skins and furs did much service, as well as textiles; undressed sheep-skins, in particular, were often used, especially among the humble. But the material most generally worn by the population as a whole was wadmal (*vaðmál*), a coarse, home-woven woolen cloth. This was comparatively cheap, and easily obtained, for most families owned a sheep or two. As the spinning-wheel was not yet known, all thread was made by hand by means of the distaff and the spinning whorl of bone or pottery; and from the thread thus produced the Scandinavian housewife and her servants made the cloth upon simple looms closely resembling those employed in recent times by the population of the Faroes. Most of the wadmal seems to have been worn in the natural colors of the original wool, plain white or brown, or the two colors combined in stripes. The plainer and cheaper the cloth, the plainer the color, seems to have been the rule; but the coarsest of wadmal was also dyed, sometimes in bright shades. For the most part, vegetable coloring was used; blue, yellow, black, brown, and green, especially, were easily obtained from certain weeds and flowers and from the barks of trees.[2] The heavy threads from which the woolen goods were fashioned were also sometimes dyed before being worked up, after which they were wrought into brightly striped or checked material, or into more elaborate patterns composed of raised figures in different colors. The native weavers also made distinctly finer qualities of cloth from the best of the native wool; and in this brighter colors were displayed, and more attention given to fancy de-

Materials for Clothing: Native Products

[2] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 151; Olassen and Povelsen, *Reise durch Island*, I, 87–88.

signs and patterns. Still another home-woven fabric was produced by simple under-and-over weaving, between the threads of which hair was worked, thus producing a kind of plush.[3]

Imported Materials

Cotton was not yet grown in Southern Europe to any appreciable degree, but the Scandinavians imported a little of it into their homeland from the Orient. It was so expensive, however, that it could be worn only by the rich. The same was true of linen, which was spun and woven from domestic flax, as well as purchased from abroad; but the price was three or four times as great as that of wool, which, in the form of cloth of a finer and thinner quality than the native product, was imported for the use of the wealthy, as were also ready-made woolen garments. The foreign fabrics were usually of gayer color than the Northern weaves, bright reds, blues, and purples being favorite shades; for the colors worn by the men were as gay as those of the women. These imported stuffs sometimes displayed patterns woven of silk, and designs worked into the wool in gold and silver thread. Native merchants also brought home some silk from the Orient, secured in trade; but this fabric in the form of hangings and clerical robes, stolen by the vikings from the Christian monasteries and churches to the south, also found its way into Scandinavia, to be used by the pagan natives for their adornment. Silk was, however, to a greater degree than the best imported woolen goods, inaccessible to all except those having plenty of money; for it sold for about twice the price of the latter, which, in turn, was much more expensive than the domestic wool product.[4]

[3] Gudmundsson, Valtýr, "Kleiderstoffe," in Hoops, *Reallexikon.*

[4] *Ibid.;* Bugge, *Vesterlandenes Indflydelse,* 146; Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben,* 160–161.

Garment-making, as well as the ornamentation of the garments by means of embroidery and other decorative means, was entirely the work of the women.

Garment-Making

All women doubtless could sew to some extent, and it is likely that every large household included at least one woman who was well skilled in the art of garment-making and could direct the work of the rest in providing clothing for all. The garment-maker employed a pair of primitive shears of bronze or iron, and probably cut free hand, without a pattern, after being sure of measurements, for garments were less complex then than in modern times, and fitted less snugly; but it is quite possible that for the more difficult garments she used old worn articles of the same style for patterns, or made special ones of cheap or old cloth; for, obviously, no paper was to be had in Europe at the time. As steel needles did not come into use until many centuries after the period in question, the seamstresses were dependent upon ones made from bone, bronze, iron or silver. Though used to some extent for fastening garments, as well as for ornamentation, buttons were not at the time so indispensable as later, for their place was supplied by strings, belts, brooches, and buckles.

Dress of the Poor

Naturally, the garments of the poor were simpler in style than those worn by the rich or the better-to-do; and they were also more conservative, showing less the influence of foreign fashions. The slave—his face shaven and his hair close cropped, as a badge of servitude—was clad in plain garments of coarse white wadmal, with perhaps a cap and coat of undressed sheep-skin. And the clothing of the humble cottier was almost as poor and simple—homespun, in white or sober colors.

The undergarments of the common people, were, like

the outer ones, of woolen homespun; but the rich of both sexes wore linen next to the person, though at times cotton, or even silk, took its place.[5]

In this period, there were no special night clothes; hence, upon retiring, only the outer garments were removed, the under ones being retained and worn in bed.[6]

Dress of Women

The outer dress of the women showed various styles, but perhaps the tunic or kirtle was the most usual garment, and was worn by rich and poor alike. It was made in one piece, and cut narrow or wide, with high or low neck and long or short sleeves. If the garment was loose at the waist, because of its fullness, it was held in place by a belt or girdle, sometimes of the same material as the gown, often hand-embroidered, but occasionally wrought from links of silver or gold. From the belt the housewife suspended a bag for trinkets and her bunch of keys. Sometimes a separate bodice and somewhat full skirt took the place of the kirtle. If the dress was cut low at the neck, the women often wore a kerchief of fine wool, linen, or silk around their shoulders. While at work about the house, their heads were generally covered with woolen or linen caps or kerchiefs, of which there were various styles, plain or embroidered; and when traveling the headgear was practically the same, except during cold weather, when the women substituted caps or hoods of fur or wool. Knit woolen stockings were the rule. The shoes worn by both men and women resembled moccasins, in that they were generally made from one piece of leather; but they were of higher cut, and came well above the ankle. Undressed sheep- or calf-skin or cow's hide were used for the more common footwear, but tanned and finely

[5] Keyser, *Private Life*, 76.
[6] *Egils Saga*, 192; *Laxdoela Saga*, 33.

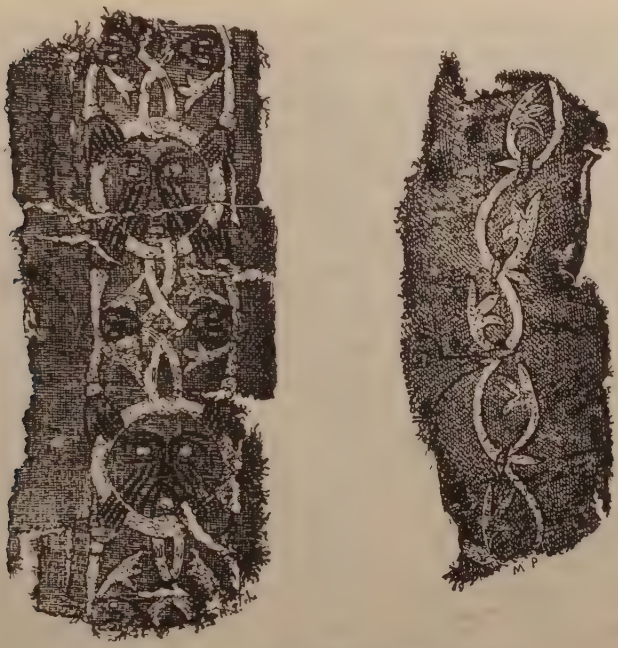


Fig. 1. Fragments of Embroidered Cloth.

dressed skins were worked up into a more elegant variety. Such dress shoes were decorated in various ways, sometimes with embroidery, and the strings fastening them to the feet ended in tassels or metal ornaments. Gloves or mittens of wool or skin, often lined with fur for winter wear, protected the hands. The usual wrap for women was a cape or sleeveless coat, held in place upon the breast by a large brooch or buckle. The favorite colors for this garment were red or blue, and woolen cloth was the most common material employed in its making; but lamb and sheep pelts served the poor for heavy winter wraps, and costly and beautiful furs were displayed by the rich. If the cape was of cloth, it was often richly ornamented. In fact, it seems to have been

a show garment, and was most elaborately decorated of all. The most usual form of ornamentation was embroidery in gay colors, sometimes stitched with gold and silver thread (Fig. 1), and studded with jewels. Fancy woven bands, edgings of fur, or fringes of wool or metal were also employed to embellish this wrap.[7]

Jewelry

Massiveness characterized the jewelry, some of which was imported, but many of the finest examples were of native manufacture, though showing foreign influence.[8] Bronze, gilded or plain, gold, and silver, were the usual metals; and silver was, during the viking period, much more general than gold, though in earlier centuries the latter appears to have been more commonly seen in jewelry. The ornaments included almost every known sort: earrings, arm-rings, ankle-rings, bracelets, stick pins, ornamental brooches and buckles, necklaces, finger rings, and diadems, or other hair ornaments, receive frequent mention in the contemporary literature, or have been found in the tombs. Earrings, however, do not seem to have been common, and were perhaps largely limited to Swedish Scandinavia. Such samples of this jewel as have been found are, for the most part, large and in the form of pendants. Judging from the unusual size of the ear-loop, these ornaments were worn by being hung over the ear, rather than suspended by means of a perforation in the ear lobe.[9] Ankle rings were found only in Swedish Russia, where Oriental influence was strong, and here perhaps only in the southern part, along the Volga.[10] The brooch was the most

[7] Keyser, *Private Life*, 100; Gustafson, Gabriel, *Norges Oldtid*, 116; *Origines Islandicae*, II, 612.

[8] Montelius, Oscar, *The Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 167.

[9] Arne, T. J., *La Suède et l'Orient*, 209–211.

[10] Ibn-Fadlan, 17.

Fig. 2. Silk Cuff or Wristband with Pattern Woven in Gold Thread. (From Müller's *For Oldtid*)

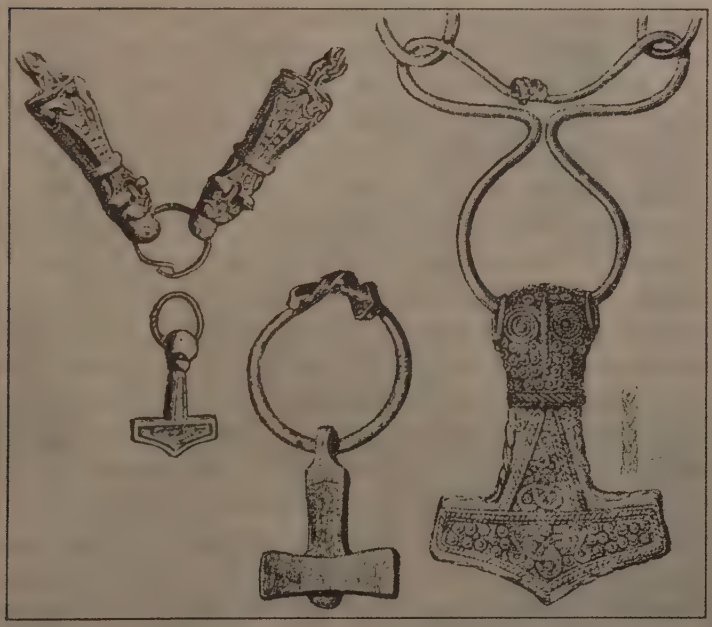


Fig. 3. Pendants in the Form of Thor's Hammers. (From DuChaillu's *Viking Age*. Copyright 1889. Published by Charles Scribner's Sons)

common ornament, and was worn by both rich and poor. Two general styles prevailed, though many other patterns appeared; the one was round and cup-shaped, the other, oval, and deep like the shell of a tortoise. Both were ornamented very richly with interesting and often grotesque designs, frequently inlaid with enamel, and occasionally set with semi-precious or precious stones. Finger rings, bracelets, and arm rings, often showed spiral patterns, and were fashioned from plaited or twisted wires as well as from flat bands, wrought ornamentally.

The greatest variety was found in the neck ornaments. Some of these were in the shape of chains bearing pendants of Thor's hammers (Fig. 3), foreign coins, or bracteates modeled after these coins, combining on the same surface the faces of Roman emperors, original Northern designs, and runic inscriptions. Other decorations for the neck were in the form of broad collars of one piece of metal, or of gold or silver links. Sometimes they were of heavy wire twisted into rope-like bands. But the most common neck jewelry was a string of beads of colored glass, amber, stones—such as agate or carnelian—mosaic work, bronze, silver, or gold. For a time, strings of green beads were very much the fad among women in Swedish Russia, where unusual fondness for neck ornamentation prevailed, presumably in imitation of Oriental styles; and here also in the ninth century there was a fashion of indicating a man's wealth—and, hence to some extent his social standing—by the number of neck chains displayed by his wife. When he acquired a certain minimum amount of money, he bought her one chain; when this sum was doubled, she was given another; and so on. The wife

of the successful merchant was often quite loaded down by these tokens of her husband's prosperity.[11]

Hair-Dressing among Women

Girls and young women wore their hair flowing—perhaps sometimes plaited. It was held back from the forehead by means of a bright ribbon, a comb, metal ornament, or string of beads. If the hair was long, the ends were occasionally tucked into the belt in front. Matrons appear to have usually coiled their hair upon their heads, where it was concealed most of the time by an ornamental head-dress or cap; but when the head was bare, fancy hair pins and combs of metal or ivory were worn for decoration. The women of the Northland at times doubtless also changed the color of their tresses by artificial means. As blondeness characterized the dominant class, fair hair was the fashionable shade. Consequently, brunette locks were converted into blonde through the medium of bleaches, probably learned from the Celts, who used them for the same purpose. These bleaches were made from lye from wood-ashes, generally combined with animal fat to form a very strong soft or hard soap. The color produced by this means was a rich red or a reddish gold.[12]

Dress of Men

Among the wealthier classes, the clothes of the men seem to have been more varied in style than those of the women; and it is probable that the former were also dressier than the latter. On the upper part of the body, over the "sark," or undershirt, the men wore either a shirt of wool, linen, or silk, tucked into the trousers, or a tunic or kirtle—generally of heavier material than the shirt—which was worn outside the trousers and reached about to the knees.

[11] *Ibid.*, 5.

[12] Pliny, *Historia Naturalis*, XXVIII, 51; Ibn-Fadlan, 5, 73.

The lower limbs were, for more common occasions, clad in ordinary trousers of knee length, and long stockings, but for dressy wear there were close-fitting garments of wool or soft leather, resembling very long stockings, which reached as far as the loins. The dandies of the time had these cut quite tight, in order better to display their figures.[13] To hold the tunic and trousers in position belts of leather or wool were used, and if these were on the outside so that they could be seen, they were generally ornamented by embroidery or cut work. In some cases, the men, like the women, wore costly belts made from links of gold or silver. From the belt hung the sword, carried by every Northman of any standing, and a purse or pouch. Frequently the short knife, which was carried by chieftain and slave alike, and corresponded to the clasp- or pocket-knife of the present, was also suspended from the belt; but sometimes it was hung from the neck by a chain.

The men's shoes were generally of stronger and tougher leather than those of the women, and for walking on slippery ground the soles were reinforced and spiked.

The men had a great variety of jackets, coats, and wraps of many kinds from which to choose. If a shirt was worn instead of a kirtle, a short jacket drawn over it supplied the necessary warmth, particularly in Denmark. Another style of wrap, common especially among the highest classes, was a long ornamental tunic, much decorated, which extended to the feet. This was occasionally trimmed with gold, or jeweled, buttons from top to hem. The *kápa* was an ordinary sort of great coat, —made quite long, with sleeves, and belted at the waist, —which was worn especially on journeys. The mate-

[13] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 130.

rials were heavy wool, leather, or fur—or combinations of these. There were other wraps of the nature of capes, and some like shawls. The *feldr* appears to have been of this latter type, and was used by travelers as a garment in the daytime and as a blanket at night. These wraps were at times lined with fur and made from fine wool, colored with costly dyes; but Iceland exported a gray feldr, evidently of coarse wool. The size of this determined the price, which was fixed by law, the standard dimensions being about three feet by six.

Upon their heads the men wore hoods and caps, and also a variety of hats. These different types of headgear were of wool, felt, sheep-skin, leather, or fur; sometimes, though rarely, of silk. It is very much to be doubted whether even the felt hats possessed brims, and hence it is a question whether they were hats in the present sense of the term. Perhaps the article of commerce from Denmark, called *höttr,* was merely a cowl or cap, resembling the hood attached to the kápa, or common overcoat; and it seems likely that the so-called Russian or Gerzkr hat imported into Norway was rather a gorgeous Oriental turban, probably of silk. The separate cap of wool, leather, sheep-skin, or fur, was the usual head covering; but in winter travelers often substituted the cowl already referred to, as it provided better protection from the weather.

In the summer, especially when they were on their way to the meeting of parliament accompanied by a retinue of followers, wealthy chieftains often wore helmets of metal, gilded and otherwise decorated, instead of soft hats or caps, but this was done more for show than for protecting the head in a chance fight. On such occasions, men of importance usually carried a spear and shield as well as a sword.

Fig. 5. Brooch of Typical Tortoise-shell Shape

Fig. 6. Gold Brooch with Unusual Style of Ornamentation. (From Gustafson's *Norges Oldtid*)

The ornaments and jewels of the men were similar to those of the women, with the possible exception of earrings, which were probably peculiar to the latter. In the case of the upper classes, the men's garments, except the heavy wraps worn as protection against the cold, were made without sleeves—perhaps as much for displaying the favorite gold arm ring, worn near the shoulder, as for showing forth the superior development of the physical champion's biceps. Among the men also, as commonly as among the women, the large, strong brooch (Fig. 5) was employed for fastening the tunic and for holding the cloak or wrap in place.[14]

Jewelry of Men

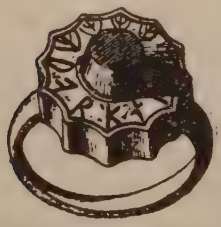


Fig. 4. Large Gold Finger Ring Set with Blue Stone. (From Worsaae's *De Danskes Kultur i Vikingetiden.*)

Men above the slave class wore their hair long and took much pride in it. It was brushed back from the face and held in place by means of a silken band, or one of gold or silver; and, if very long, the ends, as in the case of the young women's hair, were tucked in the belt. The beard was usually permitted to grow, and was worn in different styles. Men, as well as women, used bleaches. According to Pliny,[15] the men of the Germanic tribes bleached their hair more than did the women; and this was perhaps also true of the Scandinavian branch during the Viking Age. In any event, it is a fact that the Northmen by means of bleaches changed the color of their beards to a saffron yellow,[16] and in all probability the hair of their heads was transformed to a corresponding tint.

[14] Keyser, *Private Life*, 76–80; Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden*, 164; Ibn-Fadlan, 5.

[15] *Historia Naturalis*, XXVIII, 51.

[16] Ibn-Fadlan, 5, 73.

Personal Refinement

The Northmen of the early Middle Ages were perhaps as careful in the matter of personal cleanliness as were the other inhabitants of Western Europe at the time, though they were far below average present-day standards.[17] All persons laying any claim to personal decency washed hands and face in the morning upon rising, and the more refined also used basin and towel before each meal. The better classes likewise combed their hair at least once a day, using for the purpose well-made combs of bone, horn, ivory, or metal (Fig. 7); but heads were perhaps washed

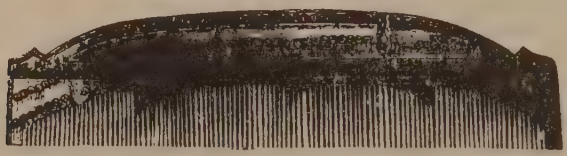


Fig. 7. Comb of Bone. (From Gustafson's *Norges Oldtid.*)

only occasionally.[18] Among some, attention was paid to the nicer details of the toilet; implements of silver for manicuring the nails were occasionally found among the possessions of the wealthy, and also silver ear-spoons.[19] But in the matter of cleanliness in clothes, the ancients were especially far behind the people of the present; underwear as well as outer garments did long service before being washed, and the average Scandinavian, like the average person in the rest of Europe at the time, was infested with vermin.

[17] Ibn-Fadlan described the Scandinavian merchants whom he observed on the Volga as the "dirtiest people that God had created" (*Araber Berichte*, p. 5); but he, as an Arab, represented a culture on the whole higher than that of Western Europe at the time; and, as a Mohammedan, to him cleanliness was a part of religion.

[18] Ibn-Fadlan, 7, 21.

[19] Johansen, K. F., "Solvskatten fra Terslev," in *Aarböger*, 1912, II, 189–264.

During the heathen period, however, perhaps more attention was paid to bathing, as well as to cleanliness in general, than was done for many centuries after the introduction of Christianity, because of the mistaken ascetic idea, which developed with the new religion, that godliness increased in proportion as the body was despised. In the summer time all people bathed, for the sake of pleasure as well as cleanliness, in the natural sheets of water and in the running streams; and they also made use of the bath-houses found upon every large farm. But perhaps the latter were more generally used in the winter time, when a hot bath would be more appreciated. In Iceland, the bath-houses were often supplied, by means of pipes or conduits, with hot water from the boiling springs, as well as with cold. In continental Scandinavia, where hot-springs were lacking, the water was sometimes heated in kettles for bathing purposes. Except in Iceland, where the water seems to have been collected in artificial pools, wooden vats seem to have been used for bath-tubs. In connection with bathing, as well as with the daily ablutions, the ancient Northmen doubtless made use of soap, with the cleansing properties of which they had become familiar through its use as a bleach.[20]

Bathing

It is likely, however, that the Northmen took sweat or steam baths in the bath-houses rather than the common tub variety of modern times. The steam was produced by sprinkling water upon a stone hearth or upon a mass of stones heated for the purpose. High up, around the walls, ran a wide shelf to which the bathers climbed for the sake of the hotter air and the denser steam; and as they lay upon this, in order to make the

[20] Olassen and Povelsen, *Reise durch Island*, I, 58–61; Henderson, *Iceland*, I, 165; II, 142–145, 149.

flesh glow and to stimulate perspiration, they switched themselves and one another with bunches of fine twigs. This system of bathing was perhaps fairly general in Western Europe during the Middle Ages, for it was practiced as far south as Switzerland in the thirteenth or fourteenth century.[21] In Scandinavia it survived until recent times,[22] and is even now very general in Finland, where Scandinavian culture still dominates; and also in Russia. In the last two countries mentioned, many persons—at least formerly—bathed at the same time, probably for the purpose of economizing upon fuel and for mutual aid in the cleansing process. And this was true in ancient Scandinavia, particularly where the bath-houses were large. Though, in general, the men used the bath-house at a different time from the women, modesty in this matter was wanting, for whole families often bathed together, without distinction of sex. The most common time for taking a bath appears to have been in the evening after supper, just before retiring.

Another cleansing process which took place late in the evening was known as "baking." The members of the household—particularly the older ones—lay before the large open fires in the living-room letting the heat play upon parts of their bare bodies, while the children or servants rubbed them. This was evidently a perspiration bath, and was also taken more often in the winter time than in the summer; but that it was thought of definitely as a method of cleansing the body is shown by the fact that the steam- or water-bathing indulged in in the bath-house was also in the early time called "baking."

[21] Sudhoff, Karl, "Badeofen," in Hoops, *Reallexikon.*

[22] Gudmundsson, Valtýr, *Privatboligen på Island i Sagatiden samt delvis i det övrige Norden,* 240–241.

This baking by the fire was probably the oldest form of cleaning one's person by means of heat in the Scandinavian North.

Regular water baths in the places originally erected for steam-bathing probably did not come into use until near the close of the viking period;[23] and it was also towards the decline of this age that many of the large hot-springs of Iceland were converted into public, or community, baths, and that in the rising towns of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden public bath-houses began to be established.[24]

[23] See "Bað," "Baka," and "Laug," in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary.

[24] Gudmundsson, *Privatboligen på Island i Sagatiden*, 243.

CHAPTER VI

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

Maidens admired in their wooers not so much good looks as deeds nobly done.

Saxo Grammaticus.

Though there seems to have been no stigma attached to the unmarried state, in either women or men, the proportion of people who failed to marry, in the Scandinavia of the heathen period, was exceedingly small. Under the primitive conditions of the time, when there were no hotels or club houses where men could live in comfort, and, as yet, no monasteries to which the family-less man could retire, matrimony offered strong inducements; and these were increased by the desire for children and the importance attached to the development of a kindred, as well as by the fact that a man could hardly stand out as a person of note in his community unless he was the head of a family and had a home of his own. In view of these considerations, perhaps virtually every Northman married, and sooner or later set up for himself in his own establishment. The proportion of women entering into full and legal matrimony was not so great as that of the men, but in many cases the surplus women, who failed to become regular wives, entered into "loose marriage" with men already legally married and were attached to their households as their concubines or their mistresses.

Conditions Favoring Matrimony

Marriages were made easier, as well as more successful, by the fact that young people met and mingled freely. Young men, if of reputable character, were permitted by fathers to call upon their daughters privately; and at banquets men and women frequently sat about the tables together. The girls were also spectators at the athletic contests and other sports; and these gatherings as well as those produced by the meetings of the thing, or parliament, afforded ample opportunity for families to become acquainted. Hence, at such times courtship and match-making flourished exceedingly.

Courtship

The considerations determining the choice of a mate were usually practical; neither romantic love nor physical beauty played much part. The standing of the family and the possession of wealth, or, at least, a satisfactory competence, were regarded as of importance by both sides; while high-mindedness and efficiency in the management of household affairs were carefully weighed by the man in search of a bride, and independent position, knowledge of the world, and renown in martial exploits on the part of the suitor were looked for by fathers and their eligible daughters. One further qualification which appears to have been emphasized was compatibiilty of temperament—the ability to "get on well together,"[1] which undoubtedly contributed much towards making successful an alliance from which affection was absent. Yet in some cases love did play a most important part in the Northland; three charming early sagas are really love stories.[2] Romantic affection was surely never completely lacking in the North, but towards the close of

[1] *Njála*, 4, 34, 35.

[2] An English rendition of the three is to be found in Magnússon and Morris, *Three Northern Love Stories and Other Tales.*

the Viking Age—probably because of contact with Southern Europe—women came more to be loved for their own sakes, and love produced a greater impulse to matrimony. The oldest surviving love verses, of which the following, by Kormak the Skald, are a sample, also date from this time:

"I set one eye of hers at three hundred in silver,
And the head she is combing at five hundred,
The whole body of the lady I would price
At Iceland, Hordland, and Denmark, and Holmgard:
She is worth the earth of England as well,
And Sweden, and the land of the Irish!

Pleasanter it is to me to be talking many a word with Stangerd,
Than to be running after the russet sheep over hill pastures.

The more they begrudge our meetings,
The more I love my lady.
For all the streams shall run backward up the land
Before I forsake thee, lady!

I shall make a verse ere we go to the ship,
And send it to my love in Swinedale.
All my words shall come to my lady's ears;
I love her twice as well as myself." [3]

Nevertheless, marriage was decidedly more a matter of business than of sentiment. And it was accompanied by some of the features connected with the system of wife-purchase, pure and simple, found among practically all peoples at some stage of their development. With the father, as head and guardian of the family, the matter of the daughter's marriage rested, regardless of that daughter's age; legally, the daughter had no voice in the choice of her husband, and, as a rule, she wanted none; for she was acquainted with no other system, and trusted her father to make an arrangement fitting and satisfactory. Yet there were, in

Betrothal

[3] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 326, 328, 340, 343; *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, II, 64–69, *passim*.

practice, many exceptions to this broad rule of paternal control. Fathers generally loved their daughters and were anxious to secure happiness for them as well as prosperity; consequently, they at times consulted them with reference to a specific suitor, and even gave them absolute freedom of choice. And, in more exceptional instances, the mother of the girl was given an opportunity to express her wishes. Daughters were, however, in some cases, no more docile in the matter than would be the average American girl, and sometimes gave trouble because their fathers failed to consult them regarding the disposal of their hands. This perhaps happened more often in Iceland, where women were, on the whole, freer than upon the continent. Hallgerda, for instance, in the saga of Njal, was angry because her views were not obtained in the selection of her first husband, and accused her father of throwing her away, matrimonially speaking.[4]

In consequence of the long journeys to foreign lands which many of them took, and of the necessity of proving themselves before they would be considered for husbands, the men were older and more mature when they married than were the women. Partly for this reason, they were given a freer choice in the selection of their mates; but generally they sought the advice of their fathers or guardians. Indeed, some sons were quite willing to leave the whole question of their marriage to their fathers; and the latter, on the other hand, occasionally took the matter into their own hands without consulting their sons. For example, one father of whom we read broke the news to his heir by the announcement: "I have wooed a wife for thee this morning."[5]

[4] *Njála*, 25.
[5] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 386.

Marriage Negotiations

The father or guardian on either side sometimes made the first move towards betrothal arrangements, but most often the suitor himself initiated negotiations. This he did by informing his father or guardian, or some other near relative, or a friend, of his choice, and this person undertook to negotiate with the girl's family. For the young man to broach the matter himself to the young woman's father or guardian was not good form in most parts of Scandinavia; but he went to the girl's home with the person who was to transact the business for him, and on such a trip, if he was from a prominent family, he was accompanied by a large following; for to go alone would be an insult to his desired bride's family. And when the marriage negotiations were transacted, he was as a rule present, though as but little more than a passive listener.[6]

If the suitor was personally acceptable, the financial side of the matter, which was of great importance, was taken up. In some parts of Scandinavia, as Iceland, the law provided for the punishment of persons who married without sufficient means for the support of children—unless the woman was past the age of child-bearing.[7] This legal precaution reflects the careful manner in which the material interests of the contracting parties, particularly those of the bride, were guarded. As a rule, throughout the North, the suitor was required to show that he could support the woman whom he wished to marry as became her station; and sometimes a guarantee of such provision was included in the betrothal contract.[8]

[6] Wisén, Theodor, *Om Qvinnan i Nordens Forntid*, 16; *Njála*, 4–6, 24–25, 143.

[7] *Grágás*, IV, 37.

[8] Keyser, *Private Life*, 45.

The matter of support having been arranged, the amount of dower (*heimanfylgja*) to be settled upon the bride by her father was discussed and agreed upon. This dower was generally in the form of money, merchandise, slaves, livestock, houses, or lands, and it remained in the possession of the bride in her new home; the husband could have only the use of, or income from it while the two lived together. Next, the amount of money or property to be settled by the groom upon his bride was considered. Of this gift, called *mundr,* the wife had the profit during her married life. The mundr generally was only a fraction of the value of the dower, perhaps a half or a third, but in southern Norway under Gulathing's law it was equal to the dower, except in the case of a widow, when it was only half as large. Sometimes, though infrequently, the contract stipulated that the husband was not to pay down this money until his wife had borne him a child.[9]

Betrothal Ceremony

After the financial part had been definitely arranged in the presence of witnesses, the betrothal ceremony took place. The father or guardian of the bride, placing her hand in that of the groom, affianced her to him, after which, those present declared that they had witnessed the betrothal.[10] A set form of words was used by those plighting their troths, the following being the one sanctioned for the bridegroom by the ancient law of Iceland:

"We declare ourselves witnesses that thou N. N. bindest me in lawful betrothal, and with taking hold of hands thou promisest me the dowry and engagest to fulfil and observe the whole of the compact between us, which has been notified in the hearing of witnesses without duplicity or cunning, as a real and authorized compact." [11]

[9] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben,* 241–242; *Norges Gamle Love,* I, 69.
[10] Keyser, *Private Life,* 25.
[11] *Ibid.*

Betrothal was not marriage, but it was of the utmost importance, for no marriage was considered legal unless preceded by a formally witnessed agreement regarding the dower and mundr, in addition to a plighting of troths. And, to be recognized by law, the settlement made by the groom must not fall below a certain minimum, called the "poor man's mundr." This was eight *aurar* (eight ounces of silver) in Iceland, and twelve in Norway.[12] If the law was not complied with in the matter of betrothal, the woman was considered merely a mistress, and her children could not inherit from the father.[13] But marriages without the proper affiancing arrangements were quite common, and were generally contracted by well-to-do men with women who were their social inferiors. Such alliances come under the head of the "loose marriages" already referred to.

Importance of Legal Betrothal

The betrothal negotiations were commonly known in the Scandinavian North as *brúðkaup,* meaning literally "bride-purchase," and the name was a relic of a time, perhaps not very far in the pre-historic past of Scandinavia, when the person of the wife was as literally bought as was a slave. But in the Viking Age the purchase was not personal, but legal; the groom, with his mundr, merely bought the guardianship over his bride, hitherto possessed by the father.[14] The dower, it was, which made the difference between the old wife-purchase and the affiancing agreements of the early Middle Ages. This

[12] *Grágás,* IV, 34, and *passim; Norges Gamle Love,* I, 27, 54.

[13] On the other hand, in Norway the early laws of the Christian period declared that a child born to a regularly betrothed pair before their marriage must be recognized as legitimate and entitled to inherit, provided that marriage subsequently took place. Keyser, *Private Life,* 29.

[14] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben,* 240; Bååth, A. U., *Nordiskt Forntidslif,* 104; Wisén, *Om Qvinnan,* 17.

sum helped the husband with the expenses of supporting the family, and as it was generally larger than the mundr —and always at least equal to it—the wife's family was under no financial obligation to the groom. Hence, with the origin of the dower, the position of the wife greatly improved; the husband had not his former absolute control over her, her family could interfere for her protection, and divorce was easily secured. This change in the status of the wife in the North corresponded closely to that taking place at an earlier time in the Roman Empire.[15]

Since betrothal was a very serious arrangement, neither side could break off the engagement without incurring punishment and disgrace. If the suitor or the guardian of the girl violated the troth, the punishment fell upon them; but the girl was not held responsible unless she personally rebelled against the arrangement made for her, in which case she was liable to the usual punishment of outlawry and banishment. A widow, however, who had affianced herself against the advice of her kinsmen might become free from her obligation, providing she paid a fine of three marks to her betrothed. But if a man eloped with a woman engaged to another he was forced to pay a very heavy fine which must be divided between the girl's father and her suitor; and, in addition, he might be outlawed. The girl, if it could be proved that she consented to the elopement, might also suffer outlawry. Nevertheless, there were some circumstances under which the betrothal arrangements might be legally set aside by the suitor. If, for instance, after betrothal the girl was found to be suffering from poor health or from serious physical defects, the suitor was released from the contract, and the father or other

[15] Maine, *Early History of Institutions*, 312–317.

guardian who affianced her could be punished by lesser outlawry, unless he could prove that he had been ignorant of the inferiorities, or that the suitor was aware of them, at the time of the agreement.[16]

Marriage

The interval between the betrothal and the wedding varied considerably; if there was nothing to prevent, however, the nuptials took place quite promptly, generally in the summer or early autumn; but very often young men engaged themselves before going abroad, in which case three years or even more might elapse before they claimed their brides. And some laws required that women wait for the return of their lovers the three years which were generally necessary for the completion of the long trading- or viking-journey to the East, before betrothing themselves to another. If the marriage was to take place shortly, it appears to have been considered bad form for the young man to call upon his betrothed in the interval. In the viking period the wedding was usually celebrated at the home of the bride, to which the groom, if he was a man of importance, rode in state, followed by his relatives, groomsmen and retainers. But it was not uncommon for the ceremony and marriage feast to be held at the groom's home, and at a somewhat later period this appears to have been the rule, particularly after the introduction of Christianity. In the latter case, the bride was sometimes taken home by the groom himself, but more often she went on the bride's journey (*brúðferð*) to her new home, accompanied by her maids, relatives, friends, and other followers; and the groom, as the host, with his retinue met the party a quarter of a mile from his residence and welcomed them. At times, in Iceland, the wedding guests were entertained in booths or tents

[16] Keyser, *Private Life*, 29; Du Chaillu, *Viking Age*, II, 7–9.

at this point until evening; but when darkness began to fall the whole gathering fell into a procession and rode to the groom's house, two by two. This was called the bridegroom's ride (*brúðgumareið*), and, though it perhaps dated from heathen times, it survived in Iceland until about a century and a half ago.[17]

For the ceremony, the bridal pair were clad in their best, but except for a long scarf, or veil, worn by the bride, there appears to have been nothing about the costumes peculiar to the occasion. This veil was of fine white linen among the wealthy, and was called *lin;* among the humbler, the material was cheaper, and the article was known as a *ripti.* The veil was wound about the head of the bride and apparently concealed her face. The two loose ends either hung down behind or were held by the bridesmaids, who appear to have numbered two or more. Perhaps for the first time in her career, a bunch of keys hung from the young woman's belt, in token of her new authority as head of a house.[18]

The guardian of the bride who officiated at the betrothal seems to have had full charge of the marriage rites also. Just what form the ceremony took in the heathen period is not clear, but it is probable that it consisted of a repetition in the presence of witnesses of pledges very similar to those made at betrothal, as was the case after the christianization of the North. This was the civil part; but there was a religious element also, for Thor's hammer was used to consecrate the bridal pair, and it is probable that the blessings of Var were invoked as well. In Denmark, at least, sacrifice was offered to the goddess Freyia, in the hope of

17 See "Brúðferð" and "Brúðgumi" in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary.

18 *Corpus Poeticum Boreale,* I, 178–179.

insuring offspring from the marriage.[19] Though finger rings were exchanged at weddings in early times, no special ceremonial significance appears to have been attached to them.[20] Gifts were probably also presented by friends and relatives of the bridal pair; and at a very early date the groom gave the bride, on the morning following the wedding, a present called the "morning gift." In the first centuries after the introduction of Christianity, such a gift was required by law, and in some cases the minimum amount which it might cost was specified. Some of the laws also specified that the bride must give the groom a present of equal value.[21] It is probable that these gifts in some parts supplanted the heimanfylgja and mundr of the heathen period, which, however, persisted well into the Christian time, at least in Iceland.

Following the ceremony came an elaborate feast. Among the rich, hundreds of guests might be present for the marriage and remain to the banquet, which sometimes continued for as long as a week. But very lengthy and extravagant wedding festivities led in the early Christian days to legislative regulation; in some cases their length was limited, and in others, the drinking.[22] During the festivities—generally in the first part of them—the dower and mundr were paid down by the bride's father and the groom.[23] After the celebration was concluded sometimes the young people set off immediately for the new home prepared by the groom—unless the

[19] *Ibid.*, I, 179; Keyser, *Private Life*, 31.

[20] Lehmann, Karl, *Verlobung und Hochzeit nach den nordgermanischen Rechten des frühen Mittelalters*, 65–67.

[21] "Dale Laghen," 26–28, in collection called *Biarköa Rätten;* "Uplandzlaghen," 15–16, "Wästmannalaghen," 11, "Helsinglaghen," 8, in *Swerikes Rikes Lagh-Böker.*

[22] Kålund, "Familielivet på Island," in *Aarböger*, 1870, p. 310; *Guta-Lagh*, 50.

[23] *Njála*, 17; Lehmann, *Verlobung und Hochzeit*, 83–89.

wedding had been solemnized there; but occasionally they spent some time at the home of the bride, if she had been married at home. Very often they took up residence with the groom's father, and remained a part of his household for many years, or even until his death. This last arrangement was more usual in Sweden and Denmark, where emphasis was placed upon family solidarity, than farther west, where there was more individualism.[24]

Polygyny

Though monogamy was the rule in Scandinavia, plural marriage on the part of the men was by no means unknown. But the practice was more common in some parts of the North than in others, and also varied in different periods of the ancient and early medieval times. Centuries before the viking era, the Northmen, like the other Teutonic peoples and the ancient Celts and Slavs, practiced polygyny; but the custom appears to have become less common by the dawn of the historic period in Scandinavia. In the sagas, for instance, there seems to be no record of full, legal marriages of a plural nature.[25] The viking voyages, however, seem to have revived and increased the practice. Imitation of the Oriental harem appears to have made more common plural marriage in Swedish Russia, and in the West the warrior's and merchant's long absence from home resulted in legal recognition of their right to maintain wives in different places. Icelandic law, for example, permitted every man to have two wives, one in Iceland and one in Norway.[26] But it is hardly likely that polygyny was found among any except the wealthier

[24] Kålund, "Familielivet på Island," in *Aarböger*, 1870, p. 317.

[25] Hildebrand, *Lifvet på Island under Sagotiden, passim* to p. 298.

[26] Steenstrup, Johannes C. H. R., *Normannerne*, I, 222–227; Bugge, *Die Wikinger*, 84–87.

classes; the humble cottagers and the poorer bóendr were probably all monogamists. And after Christianity was well established in the North, plural marriage came under the ban of the law.[27]

Besides his one or more legal wives, a man might have —and in the old heathen days, in particular, frequently did have—other women with whom he maintained various sex relationships. Among these was the wife with whom he had made a "loose marriage" by entirely omitting betrothal formalities, or some of the other steps necessary to making the alliance full and regular;[28] but neither such wives nor their children ranked with the wife of a regular marriage or her children. It was very common also, especially among kings and other men of high rank, to support one or more mistresses. Such women were often slaves, but not always. Since the custom of maintaining mistresses was well established in the early Middle Ages, no hint of disgrace attached to the man because of it, and little to the woman, even if she was free, though her status was distinctly an inferior one in the household.

Sometimes the man maintained a separate establishment for his mistress, through preference, or in order to preserve peace with his legal wife.[29] After the introduction of Christianity, the laws of Denmark tried to improve the status of the mistress of an unmarried man and to discourage loose sex relationships by providing that if the woman went in public with the man, ate and drank with him, and was known for three years to be his mistress she became at the end of that time his legal

[27] Boden, Friedrich, *Mutterrecht und Ehe im altnordischen Recht*, 122–125.

[28] *Egils Saga*, 22.

[29] *Saga Olafs Konungs ens Helga*, 3; Adam of Bremen, 19; *Lacdoela Saga*, 29.

wife.[30] Moreover, some of the laws of other lands of the North tried to raise the dignity of the home by direct legislation for punishing men and women alike for sex immorality in general;[31] but in Scandinavia, as in other parts of the world, sex irregularities are dying hard.

Position of Wives

In spite of the fact that they were, in a sense, sold into matrimony and were the wards of their husbands, the legal wives really held an honored position; and within their own homes they enjoyed much independence of action. The bunch of keys at the matron's belt was a real symbol of her control of matters indoors. Though the husband succeeded the father as guardian, he, like the former, showed a certain consideration for his wife's wishes, and even consulted her with reference to matters of weight.[32] As guardian of his wife, he was expected to avenge any wrong inflicted upon her, or to demand amends for the misdeed; and in case his wife was guilty of wronging another, he was also responsible. In view of the obligation of the husband, the law prohibited the wife from making any bargain or purchase involving a sum beyond a certain maximum, determined by the rank of the husband; if the amount was exceeded, the latter might repudiate the bargain.[33] His position as guardian also gave the man the right to inflict physical punishment upon his wife, though she could no more lift her hand against him than could a child against its parents. It was, however, considered unmanly in the North to strike a woman,[34] but only in Iceland was the right of a man

[30] *Valdemar den Andens Jydske Lov*, 44.

[31] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 16, *Kong Erics Sjellandske Lov*, 64.

[32] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 604; *Flóamanna Saga*, 37; Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden*, 152.

[33] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 29; *Swerikes Rikes Lagh-Böker*, 38.

[34] *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, I, 121; Keyser, *Private Life*, 41.

to beat his wife seriously curbed or checked by law.[35]

Certain contrasts and anomalies as regards the position of the wife should be considered in this connection.

Transfer of Wives

These were exceptional, but are of value as throwing light upon the time, and afford interest, for most of them were found in Iceland where women had an unusually independent position. For instance, in that island husbands occasionally gave away their wives to their friends—an act complimentary to the friend and not at all derogatory to the donor.[36] The wives do not appear to have been consulted with reference to the transaction, but if very averse to it, they would probably have made their views known. The mercantile bent of the Scandinavian was also displayed in his attitude towards his wife; for, when trading goods or lands with another, he was sometimes unable to resist the temptation to exchange wives as well, and did so regardless of the wishes of his wife. We read, however, of a determined Icelandic matron named Sigrid, disposed of by her husband in trade, who "hanged herself in the temple because she would not change husbands."[37] Furthermore, the sale of wives outright was not an unusual practice, though it was perhaps more peculiar to continental Scandinavia than to Iceland; and as late as the eleventh century, when Christianity had secured considerable hold, the pope complained of the barter and exchange of wives which was carried on in the North.[38]

Wives sometimes secured new husbands also as the result of a duel. If a man took a fancy to the wife of

[35] Bugge, *Die Wikinger*, 55.
[36] *Flóamanna*, 29–30.
[37] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 43.
[38] Bugge, *Die Wikinger*, 55.

another, he might challenge the husband to a fight with swords, staking the woman upon the issue. Such methods were usually employed only by men of the ruffian type, generally professional fighters; but in those days it was not easy for a husband to ignore such a challenge, unreasonable though it was, for it was the outgrowth of the exaltation of warfare which characterized the period.[39]

The Suttee

Because of its late settlement, Iceland seems never to have had the suttee practiced within it, but this custom was found in the remainder of the North during the Viking Age, as is very evident from the ancient writings. According to the Saga of Olaf the Holy, when Earl Valgant of Götaland was about to depart on a visit to King Olaf, at the command of the latter, he gave his wife the necessary orders in case of his death, including the instruction to erect a funeral pyre on which she must cremate all of his property, and then herself.[40] The Saga of Olaf Tryggvasson states, furthermore, that it was customary for the wife to be buried with the husband, but it makes it plain that such sacrifice might at times be avoided, by narrating how Sigrid, a foresighted, life-loving dame, divorced her husband, Erik, when he grew old, on the simple ground that she did not wish to be buried with him.[41] Gunnhild, another shrewd woman, avoided all risk, according to the saga, by refusing to marry Haakon Jarl because he was old when he courted her, and she did not wish to die with him, as the law demanded.[42] In spite of the allu-

[39] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 196; *Gísla*, 2; *Gull-Thoris Saga*, 12.

[40] Schetelig, Haakon, "Traces of the Custom of 'Suttee' in Norway during the Viking Age," in *Saga Book*, VI, 180–209; Seger, "Frauengraber," in Hoops, *Reallexikon*.

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 477.

sions to the law, however, the suttee was certainly exceptional in the viking period, and even in the most conservative parts—quite unlike in India of the last century—no stigma appears to have attached to the women who contrived to survive their husbands; while in Iceland, which was closely bound to the continental North, widows were in excellent standing, and often married more than once after the death of their first husbands.[43]

In fact, sometimes immediately after the death of their husbands, Icelandic women became the wives of relatives-in-law through inheritance; this came about, as a rule, through a man's falling heir to a deceased brother's widow along with his movable goods and his land.[44] And even at the present day in Scandinavia it is very customary for a man to marry the wife or betrothed of his brother, in the event of the latter's death. This custom, in common with the ancient one, originated from the fact that the brothers of the father stood closer to the children than those of the mother, and in the absence of grown sons of the widow, her late husband's brother became the guardian of both her and the children. By marrying the widow he could more easily perform the duties of his office; and, furthermore, he thus prevented the wife's property from going out of the husband's kindred group.[45]

The above-described cases of inconsistency and disregard for the dignity and rights of the wife may be accounted for by the fact that the Viking Age in Scandinavia, like the present age in Christendom, was one of transition—especially for the woman; hence old customs were still tolerated while new ones were being introduced.

[43] See pp. 419–421 and note for further consideration of the suttee.
[44] *Gísla*, 3, 43.
[45] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 249–250.

Yet, in spite of these antiquated survivals, the position of the Northern wife was at this time perhaps more enviable than that of any other women of contemporary Europe.

The station of comparative independence enjoyed by the Scandinavian women may largely be accounted for by the ease with which they could secure a divorce and yet retain their property. The financial settlement made by the man upon his bride at betrothal served as a sort of security for good conduct on the part of the husband. The threat of the wife to leave and take her property with her must have frequently proved efficacious in securing what she wished. In the heathen time, though marriage was hard to enter, it was exceedingly easy to escape from; and a husband could not force his wife to return to him against her will. The rights of the Icelandic woman, in particular, were well guarded, though they were not equal to those of the men before the divorce courts; but throughout Scandinavia in this period women probably fared much better in the matter of grounds for securing separation from their husbands than they did after Christianity was firmly established.

Divorce

The greatest injustice shown to the women in this regard was in the matter of unfaithfulness on the part of the husband. If the wife proved unfaithful, the husband could divorce her and retain both her mundr and her dower, while unfaithfulness on the part of the husband was his special prerogative; the wife had no redress against it except to desert him, and if she did so, she lost her dowry.[46] That women did not always yield readily before the charge of unfaithfulness is shown, however, by the fact that when the Icelander, Thorkel,

[46] Keyser, *Private Life*, 50.

accused his wife, Asgerda, of disloyalty, she promptly informed him that if he did not disregard the gossip which he had heard about her, she would immediately claim a divorce and make her father demand both her dower and her mundr.[47]

In many cases, divorces were secured upon very trifling grounds, and occasionally on virtually no grounds at all. There appears to have been some inconsistency in the law and custom governing such separations, as regards the division of property, but, in general, if the divorce was secured upon slight basis, and there was mutual agreement to the separation, the wife retained her dower and the husband kept the mundr; while the wife was awarded one third of the wealth acquired since marriage. But if either had been a grave offender, the one demanding divorce retained both the dower and the mundr; and if it was the husband who was securing the separation, the wife had no share in the gain in wealth since marriage.[48]

In Iceland a woman could secure a divorce if her husband struck her, and could take with her the property settled upon her by her husband at marriage, as well as the heimanfylgja. For a man to strike his wife in the presence of company was particularly inexcusable before the law, because especially humiliating to her. There are several instances on record of Icelandic women who secured divorce for this cause.[49] Men also obtained separation because of mistreatment by their wives. Bardi, whose wife was Aud, is an example of this. One morning Aud woke before her husband and proceeded to rouse him by starting a pillow-fight; but she kept up the game

[47] *Gisla*, ch. 9.
[48] Boden, *Mutterrecht und Ehe*, 113–114.
[49] *Laxdoela Saga*, 98; *Origines Islandicae*, II, 96; *Saga Library*, II, 25.

so long that her husband wearied of it and displayed his irritation by slapping her when he finally cast the pillow back. Whereupon, Aud, in turn, became angry and, finding a stone, threw it at Bardi, which so incensed him that upon that very day he divorced himself from her, declaring that he would "take masterful ways no more from her than from any one else."[50] But it is interesting to note that the playful spouse departed with her dower.

Among miscellaneous reasons for divorce was the failure of the husband to treat his wife's relatives with what she regarded as due consideration.[51] And in some parts the fact that husbands took their wives' property out of the country without the wives' permission, was cause for divorce.[52] In Iceland, either could divorce the other for wearing clothes like those of the opposite sex —a matter upon which the population seems to have been strangely sensitive. For instance, a woman who wore trousers and a man who wore a shirt so low cut in front as to expose much of his breast were liable to divorce. Here, the women, who were the garment-makers, had a special advantage, of which they sometimes made use. One shrewd matron of whom the sagas tell, desiring a divorce, purposely cut her husband's new shirt too low in front, and after he had been so stupid as to put it on and wear it, demanded separation from him on the ground of his having done so.[53]

In the heathen time, the Scandinavian procedure in securing a divorce was simple. In Iceland, and probably also throughout the whole North, if a woman was the

[50] *Saga Library*, II, 258.
[51] *Glúma*, 59; *Gísla*, 98–99.
[52] *Grágás*, IV, 42.
[53] *Laxdoela*, 99–101; Keyser, *Private Life*, 52–53.

plaintiff, she must, before witnesses, give reasons for her actions,—declare herself separated from her husband, at three different times and in three different places —first, before her husband's bed; next, before the principal entrance to the house; and, finally, before a public assembly.[54] Presumably, the same formalities were necessary if a man was the plaintiff. This constituted a legal divorce, but probably many couples separated and contracted other marriages without any such formalities,[55] the termination of their wedlock being signalized merely by the departure of the one or the other and the division of property. If a peaceful private settlement regarding the property could not be effected, the division was made by the courts, or the matter became the cause of an interminable feud between the families concerned.

In the ancient time there was no legal obstacle to either of the divorced parties immediately contracting for a fresh marriage; but after Christianity was established the matter of marriage and divorce came under the control of the church. Consequently, a great change took place, and legal separation was thenceforth impossible for either party, except for unfaithfulness or for marriage within forbidden degrees of relationship, which were now carefully defined; and in the former case remarriage was prohibited.[56]

[54] *Njála*, 20–21; Keyser, *Private Life*, 53.
[55] Boden, *Mutterrecht und Ehe*, 108–113.
[56] Keyser, *Private Life*, 54.

CHAPTER VII

POSITION OF WOMEN

Thore, Enraade's brother, erected this stone in memory of his mother and sister, good women. The death of the mother is the greatest misfortune for the son.

From an ancient rune stone.

The Scandinavian women of the early Middle Ages were the product of the time in which they lived; into their mental composition went much of the strength and freedom of the viking North. For though they were legally under guardianship to some male member of their family practically the whole of their lives, and though matrimony at the time involved unusual risks, they nevertheless enjoyed more independence than any other women of contemporary Europe. In the intense life of the period they played a leading part, and their qualities made them worthy of the rôles allotted to them. Like the goddesses of their mythology, they were well developed, all-round women. Since there was but little difference in the mental training of the two sexes, each could find intellectual companionship in the other. For they were not, during the heathen period, shut out from communion with the men, as were the women of the Athenian world, and locked into the kitchen and nursery—forcibly doomed to isolation in the "quiet world of home." Instead, they lived in such close fellowship with their men folk that the aims and ideals of the latter largely colored their own lives. They, therefore, represented what is com-

General Status of Women

monly known as the "masculine" type of womanhood, which is, after all, only a well-developed human type.

Since it was customary for all women to take part in the various activities making up the life of their time, even the most energetic of them and the most "advanced" were honored and respected, if they were women of worthy character. In this regard, the North contrasted especially well with classical Greece, where a woman, in order to preserve the esteem of others, was forced to remain strictly at home, since those who mingled with the men and shared their interests—which were only human interests—were likely to be classed as "bad."[1]

But while possessing the strength and courage making them worthy sisters, wives, and mothers of the warriors who terrorized Christendom during three centuries, they also displayed qualities generally classed as feminine —tenderness, self-sacrificing love, loyalty, and devotion. Many a Scandinavian mother saved her new-born child from the death to which its father had condemned it; and there are repeated instances of wives and daughters who perished with the men of the family when their home was set afire by an enemy, preferring death with to life without them; and also of women who harbored and cared for their outlawed men folk, in defiance of the law, or chose voluntary exile with them.

In view of the time, the women were deferred to and protected to a remarkable degree. Custom demanded that they be permitted to leave a house about to be burned, and they were the first to be removed from a sinking vessel.[2] The honor, at least of the well-born

[1] Bajer, Fredrik, "Oldnordens Qvinde," in *Nordisk Månedskrift for Folkelig og Kristelig Oplysning*, Mar., 1871, p. 181.

[2] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 66; *Gull-Thoris Saga*, 34.

girl, was jealously guarded by her male relatives; any wrong done her was promptly avenged; and in the early Christian days, if not before, there were laws in most of the provinces for inflicting punishment upon men insulting or otherwise wronging women. The legislation of the island of Gotland in this regard was particularly praiseworthy.[3] In general, women were also the equals of men before the law, the chief exceptions being the discrimination shown against them in the matters of divorce and inheritance; but in the latter case the partiality shown their brothers was probably more apparent than real, for it seems likely that in many parts of the North the difference was made up by the amount which they received for their dowers.

Because of the respect which the men had for their opinions, the women wielded great influence in warfare, whether on the foreign battle-field, or at home in following up a feud. Sometimes they exerted themselves in behalf of peace, but more frequently they urged the men on to fighting, for they seem to have been even more resentful than the latter of all violation of family honor; and many a feud which doubtless would have died out of itself was kept burning through the efforts of the women. "The women at home shall never be told that I sought shelter from sword-strokes," sang Hjalmar in his death song, "nor shall the fair, wise-hearted lady in Sigtown ever hear that I flinched."[4] And, "Never," cried the mother in the Volsunga, "shall the maidens mock these my sons at the games, and cry out at them that they fear death."[5]

Influence of Women in Warfare

With the opening of the Viking Age came an improve-

[3] *Guta-Lagh*, 47–49; *Kong Erics Sjellandske Lov*, 85.
[4] *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, I, 161–162.
[5] p. 11.

ment in the condition of the women and a general exaltation of their status. They now had a freedom, never possessed before, to be themselves and to develop naturally. In consequence, there was a new growth in individualism which is reflected in the strong, clear-cut female personalities portrayed in the sagas. Whether working for evil or for good, these women were determined and fearless, shrewd and resourceful, and when the issue turned against them, they faced defeat with proud self-control.

Effect of the Viking Age upon the Status of Women

These forceful personalities were found throughout the North. The fragmentary records for continental Scandinavia afford glimpses of them here and there; but the sagas of Iceland furnish a whole gallery of portraits of interesting women, who, because of the frontier environment in which they lived, were, probably, on the whole, even more individual than their sisters farther east.

Representative Women

Two particularly interesting personalities from the continent may be mentioned,—Gyda, the daughter of King Eric of Hordaland in the present Norway, and Sigrid, mother of King Olaf of Sweden. Gyda is described as a "maiden exceeding fair, and withal somewhat highminded." The latter quality came out when King Harold Hairfair's representative solicited her hand in matrimony for his master. The young princess is reported to have replied scornfully that she would not consider Harold for a husband until he had conquered the whole of Norway and brought it under his rule, as Eric had done in Sweden and Gorm in Denmark. The King's messenger wished to punish the girl for her independence, but Harold was much struck with her reply and wondered that he had

Gyda

not thought of undertaking the conquest before. He accordingly vowed that he would not have his hair combed or cut until he should have brought under his dominion the Land of Norway, and he promptly proceeded to make war upon his neighbors so effectively that he soon had the whole country united under his control, and was able to claim the highminded Gyda for his bride. But before these double aims were gained, the saga says, his hair had grown so long and thick as to win for him the nickname, Harold Hairfair.[6]

Sigrid

Queen Sigrid, "the wisest of women and foreseeing about many matters," was annoyed by the persistence of two unwelcome wooers—the one, a ruler to the west of her son's dominion, and the other, a sovereign in a small territory to the east—and determined to rid herself of them. Accordingly, in the night when the men, who had returned to plead their suits, were sleeping in the hall in her home, she had the building attacked with fire and sword, and all within were burned to death. "Said Sigrid hereat that she would weary these small kings of coming from other lands to woo her," which caused her thereafter to be known as Sigrid the Haughty.[7]

Hallgerda

Among the Icelandic women, one of the most clearly portrayed and of the least pleasing is Hallgerda, who plays a prominent part in the Njal Saga. She is the most conspicuous example of the strong women of the saga time who misdirected their energies and misused their talents. Proud, resentful, bad-tempered, extravagant and grasping, with a dislike for housekeeping and a fondness for brewing trouble, she was the cause of the murder of the first two of her

[6] *Saga Library*, III, 93.
[7] *Ibid.*, 286.

three husbands, and had a large part in creating the feud which resulted in the destruction of Njal and his sons.

Signy

Signy, another wilful woman, but one less harmfully so, is amusing because so suggestive of many a latter-day matron, in her fondness for doing as she pleased. Desirous of making a visit to her kinsfolk, she asked her husband's permission to do so, and he consented to her absence for half a month. But Signy ignored the limitation placed upon her stay and remained away the whole winter, letting her family get along as best it could without her while she made the most of her opportunity for enjoyment and "went to feasts at men's houses." [8]

Aud, Wife of Thorthr

Aud, wife of Thorthr, was an unlovely character representative of the somewhat "wild Western" mannish type that the frontier settlements in Iceland occasionally produced. She insisted upon wearing man's trousers, for which cause her husband divorced her. But after being repudiated by Thorthr she determined upon revenge, donned the offending garments, and, arming herself with a sword, rode in the night time to where her former husband was staying, and, finding him in bed, wounded him with the weapon which she had brought.[9]

Thurithr

Another interesting woman of remarkable spirit was Thurithr, who showed herself unusually equal to a difficult emergency, caused by the fact that her husband deserted her and their child, leaving them without means of support. When she found that he had cast her off and was planning to take ship from Iceland, she took the baby and followed him to the

[8] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 51.
[9] *Laxdoela*, 99–101.

harbor, boarded his ship, and found him upon it, asleep in his hammock. Placing the child beside its father, she helped herself to the man's greatest treasure, his sword, which was believed to possess magical powers, and took her departure. The husband, wakened by the cries of the child, missed his sword and, suspecting the reason for its disappearance, rushed forward only to see his wife being rapidly rowed away in the boat in which she came. In spite of his commands and curses, the boat of Thurithr continued to make for the shore, and it later escaped the party sent in pursuit of it. The wronged wife presented the captured sword to a kinsman, and subsequently entered into a second marriage which proved more successful. What became of the unfortunate infant the saga fails to report.[10]

Thorberga

Thorberga, who was married to Njal, is an example of the loyal wife. When Njal's enemies surrounded their home in preparation for burning it, she unhesitatingly chose to die with him.

Auda

The saga of Gisla presents an even more devoted wife in Auda, wife of the outlaw from whom the story takes its name. Long after her loyalty had first been tried, Eyjolf, an enemy of Gisla, handed Auda a bag of silver as a bribe to induce her to betray her husband. Another loyal relative, observing this, became alarmed and told Gisla, who replied, "Be of good heart; that will never be. My brave Auda will never betray me." And Auda very promptly justified his faith in her by flinging the money into Eyjolf's face, bidding him remember as long as he lived that a woman had beaten him. Later, when the pressure of his enemies forced Gisla to take refuge in a hiding place among the rocky cliffs, Auda still accompanied him; and when his

[10] *Ibid.*, 84–87.

pursuers found him here, she seized a club and beat back Eyjolf, the leader, whereupon Gisla remarked: "Long ago I knew I was well wedded, though I never knew I was so well wedded as I am."

Asgerda

Asgerda, daughter of Egil Skalagrimsson, is, on the other hand, typical of the devoted daughter. She was married and living at a distance, but when she learned that her father, heart-broken over the death of his much-beloved son, was determined to end his own life by starvation, she promptly returned to her paternal home, and through the display of shrewd tact and tender affection, she succeeded in rousing in the old man the desire to live on in order to commemorate his son in song.[11]

Aud, the Deep-Wealthy

Aud, sometimes called the Deep-Wealthy, was the most famous and most powerful of all of the women mentioned in connection with the settlement of Iceland. She was the widow of Olaf the White who had ruled Dublin. After her father had died and her son had met his death in an attempt to conquer Scotland, Aud determined to move to Iceland, where two of her brothers were already living. In spite of the vigilance of her enemies in Scotland, she had a ship secretly built in the woods, escaped in it with several members of her family and a number of her freedmen, and started on the voyage northward. But, pausing on her way at various islands off the Scotch coast, she arranged influential marriages for her granddaughters. Upon reaching Iceland, she established her title to a large tract of land, some of which she parcelled out to relatives and other supporters. The remainder she kept for herself, and administered it so well that she was from the first recognized as a person of importance

[11] *Egils Saga*, 257–259.

in the island. So noted was she for sound judgment and wise action that the men folk of her family quite willingly went to her for counsel.

When she felt old age and the end close at hand, Aud made her youngest grandson, Olaf, her heir, and arranged a marriage for him. Under her direction an elaborate wedding feast was provided and great numbers of guests were bidden to it. Aud was a large, tall woman, of queenly appearance as well as of action, and when she greeted her guests they noticed that, in spite of the burden of her years, she carried herself with her former stateliness. After greeting all courteously and seeing that they were properly served, she left the banqueting hall with a firm, quick step and retired to her bed. Upon the following day she did not appear at the usual time, and her grandson went to her sleeping-room. And there was Aud, propped against her pillow, dead. When Olaf returned to the hall and reported, all of the guests marveled greatly at the way in which their hostess had sustained her queenly dignity up to the very end.[12]

Women Without Guardians

Widows, and the very occasional women not possessed of near male relatives, were the most independent. The latter, at least after they reached years of maturity, appear to have been quite without guardians; and the former were not under tutelege except in Iceland. With this one exception, throughout Scandinavia both classes could betroth themselves and care for their own property; and, hence, could carry on business transactions as freely as a man.[13]

But as regards the women legally under tutelage, it should be remembered that then, as now, the personal

[12] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 76–85; *Laxdoela*, 7–13.
[13] *Njála*, 37–38, 74; *Origines Islandicae*, II, 605.

equation counted for much. Though the husband was the guardian of his wife, many men, while abroad, entrusted their wives with the administration of important financial matters, as well as with the supervision of large farms; and occasionally wives dominated their guardian-husbands to such a degree that the latter were well qualified for the modern "hen-pecked" class.

Women's Work in Connection with the Home

The kinds of work done a thousand years ago by Scandinavian women in connection with the home differed very little from their present-day occupations on Scandinavian farms. To them fell the lighter labor out of doors, such as helping with the hay-making, feeding and bedding the livestock, and milking the cows. If the family was wealthy, this work was performed by women slaves or servants; if poor, by the wife and daughters. Indoors, they had full charge of the house-work, cooking, mending, and sewing, as well as the care of the children; and in addition they had to serve the men, who required a great deal of waiting upon, as they do still in the country districts of the Scandinavian North. The women had not only to be in attendance at meal time, and to keep the men's clothes clean and in order, but they also washed the men's heads, scrubbed them in the bath, and pulled their clothes off for them at night when they retired.[14] And the women of Iceland still perform the last-named service.[15]

But other occupations were open to women besides those connected with household routine or farm work, and to these quite a large fraction gave a part or the whole of their time. A few of them had financial interests in ships engaged in foreign commerce; and they

[14] *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, II, 357; *Origines Islandicae*, II, 729.
[15] Hendersen, Ebenezer, *Iceland*, I, 114–115.

sometimes occupied themselves with direct trade at the local markets.[16] Some women were sculptors, or, at least, cutters of runes upon monumental stones.[17] Occasionally a woman became noted as a poet or skald, but it was quite unusual for them to take up poesy as a serious profession, as did the men.[18] Once in a while they were priestesses, and, as such, they took care of the temples and offered sacrifice. But work of this last sort was hardly likely to come to women except in a few cases when the man who built the place of worship did not desire to perform the religious duties himself.[19] In the early time—perhaps before the Viking Age—the military profession also was open to women; they were trained to handle arms, and some of them performed service upon the battle-field. The *valkyriur,* or valkyries, the "choosers of the slain" of Northern mythology, were probably deified reflections of real warriors. Such women had the word *hildr,* meaning warfare or warrior, attached to their names as a mark of their calling, as Brynhild, Ashild, Svanhild. Later, in the viking time, when women were discouraged, or prohibited, from attempting to gain military glory, the professional significance of the word was disregarded, and "hild" names were borne by women, regardless of profession.[20]

Other Occupations Open to Women

Women in the above-mentioned occupations were quite exceptional, but there were two professions outside the home of which they had almost the monopoly; these were medicine and surgery, and witchcraft and prophecy.

[16] *Origines Islandicae,* II, 608.
[17] Kermode, P. M. C., *Manx Crosses,* 90.
[18] Bugge, *Die Wikinger,* 74, 83.
[19] Bugge, *Norges Historie,* vol. I, pt. II, 46; Kålund, *Familielivet på Island,* 338.
[20] Bugge, *Norges Historie,* vol. I, pt. II, 218.

Women skilled in healing had the word *laeknir,* physician, attached to their names; and those versed in the occult used the word *völva* in the same manner. Representatives of both of these callings probably traveled through the community, or even through large districts, stopping wherever their services were required; but more often they were sought in their own homes, by, or in the interest of, the sick or wounded, or those seeking supernatural aid. Sometimes the "leech women" took the wounded away with them from the scene of battle and cared for them until well, thus turning their homes into private hospitals on a small scale.[21] And in those militant days women were perhaps much more frequently called upon to dress and care for cuts and stabs than to exercise medical knowledge in the cure of diseases.

Dabbling in magic was, in the heathen days, by no means frowned upon, unless used for evil purposes, for the gods themselves at times practiced sorcery; and the völva, because of her power, was probably more highly regarded than the woman who was a mere healer. It should be stated, however, that the two professions to some extent overlapped, for the laeknir often resorted to magical devices for effecting cures.[22]

Later Effect of the Viking Age upon the Status of Women

It has been stated that the Viking Age elevated the status of the Scandinavian women. It is no less true that this period also eventually brought about their degradation in some respects, and a restriction of some of the liberties which had been theirs. This change was to some extent due to the fact that the women abused some of their new privileges, which their lack of experience prevented them from appreci-

[21] *Origines Islandicae,* II, 552.

[22] For further consideration of these subjects see pp. 357–358.

ating. But the stronger transforming influence doubtless came through contact with southern lands, where two things inclined the Northern men to less respect for women in general,—their own with the rest. The one was the inferior character of the women of the Roman world, who suffered from the taint of Imperial decay; the other, and more powerful, was certain of the teachings of the Christian church—largely based upon the writings of Saint Paul—which changed the attitude of the men of Christendom towards women. And the heathen men from Scandinavia gradually followed the examples of the men in the south; thus the curse arising from the leading part played by Eve in the tragedy of the "fall of man" descended upon the women of the Northland even while they were still pagan.[23]

The poetic compositions of the later viking time reflect this decline of respect towards them; they are represented, in a manner suggestive of Solomon's proverbs, as fickle and unstable:

"On a whirling wheel are their hearts shapen,[24]
And fickleness laid down in their breast,"

is the cynical view of one of the poets of the period. And though the actual adoption of Christianity again brought some ameliorating changes—especially in protecting the wife against rival women—these were accompanied by various aggravating restrictions, particularly in Iceland, though here women had previously enjoyed unusual opportunities for self-expression and self-development. Much of the earlier freedom was now lost; the women were bound more closely to house and home;

[23] Bugge, *Die Wikinger*, 88–89; Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 256.
[24] *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, I, 11.

and if any wished an independent unmarried career, she could secure it only in the service of the church. This perhaps accounts for the fact that in the Christian Middle Ages we do not find so many strong female personalities in Scandinavia as during the pagan time.[25]

[25] Bugge, *Die Wikinger*, 84; Du Chaillu, *Viking Age*, II, 1; *Grágás*, IV, 203; *Origines Islandicae*, II, 119.

CHAPTER VIII

HOMESTEADS AND HOUSES

One's own home is best, though it be but a cottage. A man is a man in his own house. Though thou hast but two goats and a hut of wattles, yet that is better than begging.

The Guest's Wisdom.

Since most of the wild lands of continental Scandinavia passed into private hands in the remote pre-historic past, it is impossible to say just how individual title was established; but it seems fair to suppose that the methods employed in the "land-taking" of Iceland in the ninth century were representative in a general manner of those employed earlier, and were occasionally still in use on the continent. It was very customary for the first settlers of Iceland to secure divine aid in the choice of a homestead. This they did by carrying with them the wooden posts or pillars which had stood before the seat of honor in the old home and throwing them overboard when they approached land, thus leaving the selection to their favorite god, Thor, whose image was carved upon the pillars. Where the pillars drifted ashore the owners took up land; and later comers appear to have generally respected the decree of the thunder god.[1]

Establishment of Title to Land

Other pioneers, less pious or more independent, made their own selection from soil not already appropriated, upon some fertile headland or in a sheltered valley.

The settlers established their title to the territory

[1] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 21, 25, 67, 137, 148, 186, 188, 256; II, 143, 324.

selected by various interesting primitive devices, in addition to the appeal to the thunder god. In some cases they marked the trees growing upon the land—a procedure apparently identical with the establishment of "tomahawk claims" in the American colonial period; in others, they erected upon the soil which they wished for themselves tall poles, peeled of their bark, and probably bearing the names of the claimants.[2] Another common method was to "hallow" the land to one's self by means of fire, used in different ways—a vestige of an earlier period when fire was held to be sacred. Some colonists built great fires at the mouths of two or more rivers or streams, thus claiming the land between them; others signified their title by shooting burning arrows across the rivers.[3]

Naturally, some of the first-comers resorted to land-grabbing to a selfish degree; many owned several farms in different parts of Iceland, and at least one settler, Blund Cetil by name, laid claim to thirty of them.[4] This practice quite early resulted in quarrels over land ownership, and, in consequence, Harold Hairfair of Norway, —to whom the immigrants appear to have recognized a loose allegiance—decreed that no man should lay claim to more territory than he and his shipmates could carry fire around in one day;[5] and no woman might take in settlement a larger tract than a two-year old heifer could go around on a spring day from sunrise to sunset. Evidently, it was not expected that the women would get quite so much land as the men; but there was perhaps very little difference in the results, for generally some

[2] *Ibid.*, I, 132, 135–36, 166.
[3] *Ibid.*, 138, 149.
[4] *Ibid.*, I, 90; II, 8; *Egils Saga*, 86, 90.
[5] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 200.

man who was a good walker was secured to lead the heifer. The *Landnámabók* of Iceland tells, however, of an enterprising pioneer woman named Thorgerd who led her own heifer and yet secured an ample supply of land.[6]

In spite of the restrictions mentioned, most of the desirable free land passed into private hands within a few years after the arrival of the first Scandinavian immigrant to Iceland; and the subsequent comers who wished territory had to gain it through the bounty of relatives or friends already established, or were forced to buy, rent, or fight for it.[7] The last-mentioned method of attempting to secure land was by no means uncommon, and was often successful.

Ceremony of Transferring Land Title

When land came into new hands through gift or purchase, the transfer of title was symbolized by a formal ceremony performed by the persons interested, in the presence of witnesses. In Norway, in the case of a gift, the donor placed a clod in the lap of the recipient of the land; but when the transfer came through exchange of money the purchaser carried some mold from his newly-bought territory to the four corners of his hearth, to his high seat,—the seat of honor in his home,—to division points within the tract, and, apparently, also to the boundary marks.[8] Under some laws, the formalities

[6] *Ibid.*, 191.

[7] *Ibid.*, 56, 70, 177, 197, 230. Sometimes the recipients of what was virtually gift land gave a small present in return, to bind the bargain and make their title more secure. Mention is made in one of the ancient records, for instance, that when Stanwen the Old, kinswoman of Ingwolf, came to Iceland, the latter desired to give her some land, "but she offered him an English cape of various colors, for she wished to call it a bargain and sale, for she thought there was less risk so of having the gift cancelled." *Origines Islandicae*, I, 233.

[8] Du Chaillu, *Viking Age*, I, 482.

connected with the transfer took place at the meeting of the local assembly, and all of the thingmen present took part in the ceremony.

The land appears to have been laid out in rectangular tracts, square or oblong in shape, with a frontage on a river or lake, if possible, and at the corners were placed the boundary marks, which were protected by law against removal. The law also stipulated that when the boundary line was indicated by a stream, if the course of the current was changed, the line of the old midstream remained the boundary.[9] The corner mark was commonly a pile of stones, which, in Sweden, generally numbered five, though as few as three stones might constitute a legal landmark, or *lyritr*. In Norway, there were four stones, one long one standing on end, with three others beside it.[10]

Community Land

Besides the territory under private ownership, every community probably held some public land belonging to the inhabitants as a whole. These tracts corresponded quite closely to the village commons of colonial New England. Such general lands, or *almenning*, were of various classes. The summer pastures in the mountains of Iceland, Norway, and Sweden usually belonged to communities upon the lower lands; and most settlements possessed a forest area, in which the whole people had equal wood, water, hunting, fishing, and grazing rights. But by consent of the population, speaking through its local assembly, a part or the whole of such a common might be leased to a private individual.[11] It is not likely, however, that

[9] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 41–42.

[10] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 44; "Lyritr," in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary.

[11] Conybeare, *The Place of Iceland in the History of European Institutions*, 22.

this was often done. All sea-fishing grounds were also public, beyond a certain distance from the shore, but in some parts the king could claim a fee or tax from all who profited from them.[12]

After establishing title to a tract of land, the Northman built his home, giving it as desirable a location as possible, generally on high ground, in order to gain a good lookout for friend and foe, as well as for the sake of the drainage. When the situation permitted, the buildings were placed near a river, lake, or fiord. After satisfactory sites had once been chosen, it is not likely that they were often abandoned. There is no doubt that in Scandinavia, in innumerable instances, Christian homes and Christian churches now stand upon the very ground where, thousands of years ago, pagan dwellings and pagan temples were first erected; and since the dawn of these early architectural beginnings there have been upon most of these choice sites continuous successions of buildings.[13]

General Character of Buildings

Every Scandinavian homestead possessed a cluster of buildings, each structure forming, as a rule, but a single room. These buildings varied in shape, size, and number, according to the character of the country in which they stood, and to whether the owner was rich or poor. The cottager might have but two or three small huts upon his tiny plot of ground, while upon the estate of the rich farmer were often as many as thirty or forty separate houses, some in the group being of great size, and giving the place the appearance of a village. Though the usual shape of all Northern buildings was quadrangular, oval or circular structures were not unknown. But the build-

[12] Du Chaillu, *Viking Age*, I, 483–484.
[13] Gjerset, Knut, *History of the Norwegian People*, I, 5.

ings following curved lines were limited to the humblest classes, and seem to have been used only in continental Scandinavia; for the remains of houses found in Iceland, Greenland, and the other western islands are invariably rectangular in ground plan. It has been suggested that these more primitive rounded structures originated with the brunette people who were conquered by the Teutonic invaders.[14] Though this was probably true, it should be remembered that the huts of the modern Lapps are also circular in shape; and there is no good reason for supposing that the blonde Scandinavians never employed these early styles themselves.[15]

Grouping of Buildings

The arrangement of the group of buildings varied, too, in different parts of Scandinavia, and also changed with the passage of time. The few primitive houses upon the premises of the poor were perhaps always isolated, and were generally grouped in a haphazard manner. And in the very earliest part of the viking period the structures of the more prosperous also—dwelling houses as well as other buildings—were probably as a rule separate, the dwelling rooms standing in a row not far removed from each other, while the other buildings were grouped, in some manner determined by convenience, in the rear. Later, the rows of isolated rooms were joined into single units by means of passageways running between; but these connecting parts were always roofed separately from the buildings which they united. At this stage of development, the "house" of the Northman was several times as long as it was wide. Somewhat subsequently, an additional room would now and then be attached at

[14] Hansen, *Oldtidens Nordmaend*, 104–107.

[15] Montelius, *Kulturgeschichte Schwedens*, 283; Stjerna, Knut, *Lund och Birka*, 223.

the side of the row to open into one of the narrow halls, thus giving the group a more broken appearance. The two groupings described were in use from Greenland to Sweden during the Viking Age;[16] but in the last part of the period, in Iceland and Greenland—probably likewise in the remainder of the North—a more complex arrangement developed, which gave to the cluster of dwelling houses a more square appearance.[17] An almost identical

Fig. 8. Buildings in Modern Iceland Based on Ancient Models. (From Bruun's "Gammel Bygningsskik," in *Aarsberetning*, 1908.)

grouping is still employed in Iceland; but in Norway and Sweden, perhaps as a precaution against fires, the houses have become largely detached; and in Denmark the more convenient quadrangle, built about an open court, has come into use.

Building Materials

Many different kinds of materials were employed by the Scandinavian builders, the location determining which should predominate. Since the arts of brick- and artificial stone-making were unknown in the heathen days, the raw materials found near at hand were simply shaped for use. Throughout the North the better dwellings were probably

[16] Gudmundsson, Valtyr, *Privatboligen på Island i Sagatiden samt delvis i det övrige Norden*, 69–89; Nicolaysen, N., *Om Dr. Gudmundsson's Privatboligen paa Island*, 15–17; Horsford, Cornelia, "Dwellings of the Saga-Time in Iceland, Greenland, and Vinland," in *National Geographic Magazine*, IX, 76.

[17] Gudmundsson, *Privatboligen på Island*, 78–79; Horsford, "Dwellings of the Saga-Time," in *Nat. Geog. Mag.*, IX.

made of timber formed into boards; but many of the humbler homes were doubtless of squared or unhewn logs. The supply of wood from Iceland's meager forests was eked out by timber imported from Norway, and by drift-wood—mostly from northern Siberia—which was strewn in abundance upon the north and west coasts;[18] and there is no reason for doubting the saga statement that timber was imported to the Greenland settlements directly from Vinland upon the present North American coast. For the primitive rounded dwellings found upon the continent, the woven branches or twigs of trees in most cases formed the framework, which was plastered inside and out with clay or mud, or was covered with cloth or skins.[19] But there were some conical or "bee-hive" houses of sod or turf in which the roofs were a continuation of the walls and were formed by placing each tier of the material used a little nearer the center than the preceding.[20] Stone was used to considerable extent in the northern part of the continent, to a greater degree in Iceland, and still more in Greenland; but it was unhewn, and was frequently employed in combination with turf or mud. In the parts where lumber was scarce the builders resorted to using the bones of whales, which did service as rafters, and at times also took the place of wood in other parts of the buildings.

In Greenland and Iceland the houses were occasionally partly under ground, and hence resembled modern detached cellars.[21] The excavations were made for the

[18] Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden*, 149; *Gull-Thóris Saga*, 1; Olassen und Povelsen, *Reise durch Island*, I, 271–273; II, 111; Henderson, *Iceland*, II, 13.

[19] Gudmundsson, *Privatboligen på Island*, 110–116; Stjerna, *Lund och Birka*, 223.

[20] Gudmundsson, *Privatboligen på Island*, 107–110.

[21] Adam of Bremen, 203; Horsford, "Dwellings of the Saga-Time," in *Nat. Geog. Mag.*, IX, 76, 78.

purpose of securing warmth, or because of dearth of building materials in certain districts; but such structures were exceptional. In this western part of Scandinavia the homes were as a rule placed upon the surface of the ground, and the walls were of stone—often lava —combined with earth or turf. In Iceland, walls of this sort were generally made of three thicknesses, one on either side, of turf, and in the middle a thin layer of unhewn stone, for the purpose of stiffening and giving "body" to the whole.[22] Occasionally, earth, kneaded hard, took the place of the middle layer of stone, while stone was employed for the inner one, and the outer was made of alternate horizontal courses of turf and stone.[23] The interstices of the inside walls were calked with moss, turf, or clay; but the best houses in the North, regardless of the materials used for the walls, were lined with hand-wrought boards. Generally, the gable-ends of the Icelandic houses were also of boards, but sometimes these were built up with stone or turf. Turf or sod roofs were also seen throughout the Scandinavian lands, though the most common roofing material was wood, worked into thin boards, which were sometimes arranged like the scales of a fish, but perhaps most frequently placed lengthwise, in batten style. However, this roof might be completely covered with turf, as a special precaution against fires; for as a rule every freeman was responsible for the damage done by his own fire.[24] Such roofs were often quite heavy, and partly on this account

[22] Bruun, Daniel, "Gammel Bygningsskik paa de Islandske Gaarde," in *Aarsberetning* för 1907 Foreningen til Norske Fortidsmindesmaerkers Bevaring, page 4.

[23] Horsford, "Dwellings of the Saga-Time," in *Nat. Geog. Mag.*, IX, 76.

[24] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 46–47; *Guta-Lagh*, 86. But in Iceland there existed a system of public insurance against fire for the most important buildings making up the dwelling house, and also for food and clothing. Du Chaillu, *Viking Age*, II, 233.

the larger buildings of the North had two rows of pillars running lengthwise down the sides of the room for the purpose of bearing some of the weight. Though straw and reeds were not unknown as roofing materials, they appear to have been but little used, perhaps because of danger from fire.

Building Tools

Doubtless, the best workmanship went into the wooden buildings, especially those found upon the continent, and for these the most tools were needed; but the carpenter of the time lacked but few of the implements accessible to his modern successor, though their quality was inferior. The tools were as a rule made of iron, and consisted of hammers, hatchets, and adzes, saws, chisels, planes, braces and bits, and a few others of a more special nature. Long nails and spikes were commonly used for fastening the boards; but pins and pegs of wood served for this purpose as well.

Finishings of Dwelling Houses

The roofs of the better houses were of what is sometimes called "compass" style, with two V-shaped gable ends joined by a straight ridge pole; but the "hip" roof was not unknown. The front gables were often decorated in various ways by means of carving. A very common form of ornament was a carved figurehead—of a dragon or some other animal—painted or gilded, as for the decoration of a ship; and sometimes the discarded figurehead from a ship itself was employed; but the most usual decoration for this part of the house was perhaps ornamental edge-boards, called *vindskeiðar,* the crossed ends of which were at the top often carved to represent twisted dragons' tails, while the lower ends projecting over the eaves were shaped like dragons' heads. More simple designs, however, like those found upon the Northern

Fig. 9. Elaborately Carved Early Modern Door Frame, Resembling Ancient Models. (From DuChaillu's *Viking Age*. Copyright 1889. Published by Charles Scribner's Sons)

houses at the present time were probably most frequently seen.[25] The outsides of wooden houses were commonly left to be darkened by the weather, but both roofs and walls were sometimes covered with tar, for the protection of the lumber;[26] and it is possible that paint, particularly of a dark red color, such as could be secured from copper and iron ore, was used also at an early period. The sod and stone buildings with turf-covered roofs could not be thus artificially decorated, except at the gable ends, but the moist Northern climate soon produced a natural green covering of moss and grass which supplied the need; and many a humble sod roof bore a luxuriant growth of brightly colored wild flowers, which gave these homes a charming picturesqueness and a resemblance to a modern arbor, or garden house.

There were no ceilings, and in the roofs of the rooms in which fires were built were openings for the exit of smoke, close beside the ridge-pole. Most of the better rooms also contained window-openings, for the entrance of light and air. These were perhaps at times placed on the roofs also, but more often they were made in the walls, especially in the gable-ends.[27] Glass did not come into use in the North until Christian times; but other transparencies were employed for covering the window-openings, such as oiled cloth or the thin membrane surrounding new-born calves. This material was stretched over a frame which fitted into the aperture and could be opened and closed. In many cases, however, the windows were merely covered with wooden shutters.[28] In front of the reception room there was frequently a

[25] Gudmundsson, *Privatboligen på Island i Sagatiden*, 153–162.

[26] *Ibid.*, 162.

[27] *Ibid.*, 163, 167; *cf.* Nicolaysen, Om Dr. Gudmundsson's *Privatboligen paa Island*, 39.

[28] Gudmundsson, *Privatboligen på Island i Sagatiden*, 163.

small porch, supported by pillars often decorated with carving.[29] And in some places every outside door (*útidyrr*) of the dwelling was thus protected from the weather; for the porches appear to have been usually of the nature of storm-porches, or vestibules, and supplied with doors. Such doors were locked on the inside by means of bars; and, evidently as further insurance against being taken unawares by an enemy, in the upper part of the door was often placed a small wicket, through which a view could be secured without taking down the bars. In some cases, in the place of a wicket there was a shutter door, low enough for a man to look over, just inside the outer door.[30]

Rooms or Buildings Composing a Dwelling

The dwellings upon the largest and most progressive farms included—in addition to the connecting passageways—the following rooms or buildings: (1) *stofa* or *stufa,* the most important room in the house, and used as a living and eating room; (2) *skali,* the sleeping apartment; (3) *eld-hús,* or *soð-hús* the kitchen; (4) *búr,* or *mat-búr,* the pantry; (5) *baðstofa,* or *laug,* the bath-house; (6) *dyngja,* a building especially for the women; (7) *geymsluhus,* the store-house; (8) *gesta-hús,* a building for the shelter and entertainment of travelers and other uninvited comers. People of wealth sometimes owned special banqueting halls and also additional sleeping apartments.[31]

The stofa, which was often known simply as the "hall," was usually the largest room in the dwelling. Some of the stofas could accommodate hundreds of people at one time, and the special banqueting halls were generally

[29] *Origines Islandicae,* I, 126.
[30] *Ibid.,* II, 40, 325, 417.
[31] Gudmundsson, *Privatboligen på Island i Sagatiden,* 33 ff.

even larger. One such building in Iceland was described as two hundred feet long and sixty wide; and upon the continent, where wood was abundant, the feasting halls of many of the chieftains were doubtless of greater dimensions. Down each side of the stofa ran a row of pillars, or posts, dividing it into three sections lengthwise; and in some cases there seems to have been a cross-partitioning by similar means into three divisions.[32] Down the middle of the room was one long fireplace, or several separate ones, framed in with flat stones placed on edge. As the principle of the chimney had not yet been introduced into the North, the smoke simply made its way out, of itself, through the holes cut for the purpose in the roof. In the compartment on either side beyond the pillars and also at the end of the hall opposite the main entrance was a raised board floor, called a *bekkr,* or *pallr;* the side platforms were known as *lang bekkir,* or long benches, and the platform at the end was called the *Þver,* or cross, *bekkr.* Sometimes the raised floor was placed across one or more corners, in which case it was called a *krók,* or corner, *bekkr;* but such an arrangement was exceptional. The *bekkir,* or "benches," described in the sagas appear to have been in most cases very broad, shallow steps descending towards the middle of the room where the fireplace was, though in some cases in the humbler houses the whole platform may have been on the same level. In general, there were probably but two steps, the lower of which was called the *fóta-bekkr,* or foot-bench; but in the great halls of chieftains and kings there were doubtless several of these terrace-like platforms. The space behind or under the bekkir was sometimes filled with earth, but more frequently it was left

Stofa, or Living-Room

[32] *Ibid.,* 178; *Origines Islandicae,* I, 270.

open, and used for storing away articles of various sorts, —or resorted to as a place of hiding.[33]

Skali, or Sleeping-Room

The skali, used by the prosperous as a sleeping-apartment, was the prototype of the many buildings making up the dwelling-place of the better classes during the viking time; and a single room, sometimes having a sleeping loft, at this period still constituted the whole dwelling of the humble cottier. Where the skali was used primarily for sleeping purposes, it possessed certain fairly definite characteristics, one of which was a paneling which ran around the room at a sufficient distance to leave a space which could be used for a passage-way, or for purposes of concealment,—an arrangement perhaps made largely in anticipation of possible night attacks from enemies. This room, like the stofa, had a row of pillars running along either side for the support of the roof. Between the pillars and the paneled wall was a board floor about six feet wide, called a *set,* which ran about two-thirds of the length of the room. Upon this low platform the members of the household slept; and in dwellings having no stofa, the skali was also used as a living-room, and the people during the day sat upon this raised floor or upon the beds, as is the custom on the middle-class Icelandic farms to-day. Among the wealthier and more refined, the end of the skali was often partitioned off into a number of small bedrooms, where the members of the family and guests slept, while persons of lower rank, such as the servants, reposed upon the set. As a rule these private sleeping apartments were supplied with swing-doors which locked on the inside by means of a hasp, or with sliding doors, fastened with a wooden but-

[33] Gudmundsson, *Privatboligen på Island i Sagatiden,* 178–183.

ton. This explains why the beds within were known as "lock-beds." At times, however, privacy was secured by merely hanging curtains before the doorways; and in some cases the partitions themselves were made simply by hangings of cloth. The regular rooms were supplied with windows, evidently cut in the inner walls, and with an inner door opening into the secret passageway, which, in turn, often connected with an underground passageway, or tunnel, debouching at a considerable distance from the house, frequently in a wood. At the outer end of the sleeping-hall, near the door, was at times a sleeping loft, reached generally by means of a ladder.[34]

Eldhús, or Kitchen

In the eldhús—also called *mateldhús* (food-fire-house), to distinguish it from the stofa, where there were fires also—the food was prepared by the women and then carried into the dining apartment, or stofa, which was near at hand. As in the case of the latter, and of the skali, the floor in the eldhús was raised between the rows of posts and the walls, but here it was generally done by filling with soil a space behind a low retaining wall of boards or stones. Upon this elevated part people sat in the daytime; and sometimes servants or other members of the household slept here at night. Additional sleeping quarters were sometimes provided by partitioning off the far end of the kitchen. The hearth, or fire-place, was in the middle of the room, and in the roof above was the exit for smoke.[35] Though this special cooking-room was always found among the fairly prosperous, especially in Iceland and the continent, a single fire-room, which was a combination of kitchen and dining room, was also quite common;

[34] *Ibid.*, 206–223, *passim.*
[35] *Ibid.*, 200–204.

in such case, the cooking was done at the end of the room.[36]

Búr, or Pantry

The búr stood very close to the eldhús, and to it the kettles were brought for the purpose of dishing up victuals. This room was also the larder, or pantry, and in it food, such as bread, butter, cheese, and milk, was kept. Here, again, a portion of the floor along the walls was elevated, but in this case it served as a shelf on which to place articles, additional shelves being erected above it. The búr was kept carefully locked, to guard against thieves, and the family watch-dog was chained beside it at night.[37]

Baðstofa, or Bath-House

The bath-houses provided accommodations for either tub-, steam-, or sweat-baths, as has been stated in Chapter V. Even when intended for the use of only one household, these apartments were often quite large; and they probably remained detached from the other buildings longer than others.[38]

The natural facilities for hot bathing found in Iceland early led to the establishment of public or community bath-houses in the country districts. It happens that several of these as well as some for private use have survived down to modern times, and have been carefully described by travelers. The buildings were circular or rectangular, with low walls, generally constructed from pieces of lava. One of them was large enough to hold thirty persons at a time; another, fifty. Some of the bath-houses were placed over crevices in the ground from which issued dense currents of steam, while others spanned streams of boiling water. Such were used

[36] Horsford, "Dwellings of the Saga-Time," in *Nat. Geog. Mag.*, IX, 76.
[37] Gudmundsson, *Privatboligen på Island i Sagatiden*, 227–229.
[38] *Ibid.*, 240–241.

merely as vapor baths. In other cases, the building was at a little distance from a geyser, hot stream, or hot lake, and the water was conducted to where it was needed by means of a stone aqueduct. The containers for the water varied; some were square or circular basins hewn out of solid rock, others, merely much depressed parts of the floor of the room reached by means of a flight of stone steps. The shelf or bench upon which the bathers reclined in these Icelandic baths was also usually of stone, built up solidly from the floor.[39]

Dyngja, or Bower

The dyngja, or bower,—another part of the dwelling which long remained isolated from the other buildings—was a small structure, which in Iceland was, for the sake of warmth, sometimes placed partly under ground. In this room the women sat at their needle-work; and here they often visited with their more intimate female friends. It seems probable also that the dyngja was synonymous with the "weaving house" mentioned in the sagas.[40]

Geymsluhus, or Storehouse

In many places the geymsluhus, or store-house, probably remained a separate building throughout its history. In some instances, it was quite a roomy structure—especially if the homestead possessed only one such building; but many farms doubtless had two or more, some of them for special storage purposes, as for seed-grain, harness, goods for commerce, winter food supplies, and the like. In Sweden, the geymsluhus was of two stories, the top one being sometimes used for a sleeping apartment, the better to guard the goods stored below. And in some cases, as in present-day Sweden, there was a single story

[39] Olassen and Povelsen, *Reise durch Island*, I, 58–61; Henderson, *Iceland*, I, 165; II, 142–145, 149.

[40] Gudmundsson, *Privatboligen på Island i Sagatiden*, 244–246.

raised several feet in the air by pillars, to protect food-supplies from rats and other small animals.[41]

Gesta-hús, or Guest-House

The gesta-hús, or guest-house,—a building constructed for housing chance comers, like way-farers, peddlers, tramps, and beggars,—was generally a separate structure, simply furnished; for since the occupants were strangers to their host there was no certainty that they were honest.[42]

Out-Buildings and Farm Buildings

The out-buildings and farm-buildings connected with the homestead remain to be considered. These included the *mylnuhús,* in which the grain was ground; the fuel-house, called *torf-hús* in Iceland, where were stored the wood, turf, and other materials employed for fuel; the *smidja,* or smithy, found on every large farm; the *hlada,* or barn, in which the feed for the livestock was kept; and the stables for various kinds of domestic animals. These last were quite numerous upon the farms of the more prosperous, for the buildings were comparatively small, and each kind of livestock commonly had a house to itself, usually divided into stalls. Closely connected with the barns and stables were pens and corrals in which the cattle were milked in good weather, and into which the horses were turned out for exercise.

The materials and style employed in the construction of the farm- and out-buildings were on the whole the same as those seen in the dwellings; but rougher materials were used, and less attention paid to appearances. In Iceland and the other islands, the whole structure, walls as well as roof, was formed from stones and turf;

[41] *Ibid.,* 247–250.

[42] "Gesta" in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary.

and this was also true in the unforested parts of the continent; while where wood was plentiful unhewn logs did service for the walls, and turf was the roof-covering. Stones and turf were doubtless the most usual fencing material throughout the North, but in the forested parts rails and pickets were used to some extent.

If the homestead was near the coast, some other buildings were generally found upon it. These were the *maust,* or boat or ship house, the size of which varied greatly, according to the vessel to be sheltered; and the *hallr,* or shed in which fish were dried. This latter structure was without walls, in order that the air might circulate freely and the drying process be accelerated. Sometimes clothes were dried in the *fisk-hallr,* or in a similar shed. Finally, in connection with many homes—though often at some distance from them—were secret under-ground rooms, called "earth houses," in which fugitive members of the family, or friends, were concealed. These places of refuge often had secret passageways—already referred to—uniting them with the other buildings on the farm, or making possible escape into the woods.

Other Buildings

Occasionally, men much given to warring built small towers, which were used as strongholds to resist attacks from enemies; and as these were usually erected on high ground, they performed the additional service of observation posts.

Each homestead was approached from the high road or water-way near which it stood by a straight road which was fenced in on either side—at least in Iceland—by a wall of stone or turf. Sometimes this by-way was paved with flat stones or gravel, as protection in wet weather. In front

Private Roads

of the main door was a platform of the same material, or of hard-packed clay or boards.[43]

Such were the homesteads of the ancient Northmen, and in the possession of them as a whole the owner felt a pride, as well as in the ownership of the freehold or ancestral land which was generally a part of them. This pride was probably much keener than at present, for in those days of rural life there was no substitute for one's own home, to be purchased temporarily for money. The interest which every farmer took in his possessions is shown by the fact that every farmstead was named, frequently by terms of religious significance. Thus, we find that many homes in Iceland were called after the favorite god Thor; and we read of the name "Christness" being given to his farm, by a new convert to Christianity. Sometimes descriptive terms, like Broad Bowster, were used, but more frequently the places bore the names of their owners or the owner's wives, such as Erik's Stead, Brune Stead, Signy Stead, and Thordis Holt.

Names of Homesteads

[43] Gudmundsson, *Privatboligen på Island i Sagatiden*, 250–256; *Origines Islandicae*, I, 97, 156, 158.

CHAPTER IX

HOUSE-FURNISHINGS AND FOOD

Two seeresses are come to the king's house, Fenia and Menia; these mighty maids are held in bondage at the palace of Frodi, the son of Fridleif. They are led to the bin, and set to turn the gritstones of the mill. . . . He bade them take neither rest nor pastime, he must always hear the song of the bondmaids.

They sang and they whirled the spinning stones till Frodi's household all fell asleep. Then quoth Menia, as she stood at the mill, "Let us grind Frodi wealth, let us grind him fulfillment of joy, abundance of riches, on the bin of bliss. May he sit on riches; may he sleep on down; may he waking be happy! It were well ground then. No man shall harm his neighbor, devise any evil, or prepare any slaughter, nor smite with whetted sword, yea, not though he find his brother's slayer bound before him."

The Milling Song.

Love of Ornament Shown in House-Furnishings

The fondness for decoration displayed by the ancient Scandinavians in their dress and in the abundance of their jewelry also found expression in the equipment of their homes. Every part of the best dwelling rooms received beautifying touches, except the raftered ceiling, which, because of the lack of chimneys, soon became smoke-begrimed in the stofa, the apartment in which the Norse households took most pride. No attention appears to have been paid to this part by the housewife, beyond removing stray cobwebs from it with her broom at cleaning time. But the posts or pillars upholding the roof were often handsomely carved, and the carvings were at times painted in bright colors and touched up with gold. Between the supporting columns of the hall, high enough up to be out of the way, there was sometimes a wooden frieze, which also

bore witness to the carver's skill. Frequently the designs were conventional, with geometrical or floral motifs; but pictorial carvings were on display in the halls of the wealthy, generally representing the martial exploits of favorite heroes, or the adventures of the gods of the North; at times, however, these decorations were monuments to the desire of the owner of the house to "get a good report," and upon his walls he had depicted for the benefit of all comers the daring acts of his own career.[1]

For festive occasions, tapestries embroidered in colors by the women, in illustration of similar themes, were hung upon the walls. If the carvings were regarded as somewhat commonplace, they might be covered temporarily by the hangings; otherwise, the latter were placed below the decorative woodwork. When guests were assembled for banquets, further embellishment was added by the warriors' weapons hung here and there upon the smooth wall or against the carved posts, conspicuous among them being the sword with its flashing blade and its ornate handle, and the brightly-painted shield with its polished metal boss.

Though in the stofa the middle of the floor was only hard-packed clay, even this part was covered, especially when company was expected, to within a safe distance from the open hearths where the fires burned for most of the year. Generally, the covering was straw strewn evenly over the surface, or reedy grasses, or the fine twigs from fir or spruce trees; but for special gatherings the clay was sometimes carpeted in a richer manner, with heavy woolen cloths, or rugs made from the skins of wild animals. And for the bekkir, or raised platforms, these more decorative coverings were as a rule employed.

[1] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 183.

Most of the seats in the old time were of the nature of benches or settees, capable of holding more than one person, but there were also individual chairs of various styles. Both types possessed arms and backs, and in the seats were often built lockers in which clothes and other things could be stored (Figs. 10, 11). Like most of the articles of wood used in the ancient North, the chairs were richly carved, usually with animal designs or with figures of favorite deities or heroes. One seat mentioned in the sagas had upon its back a representation of the god Thor, with his hammer in his hand. The most important seat in the stofa belonged to the master of the house, and was known as the "high seat." It seems to have always stood at the right of the person entering the hall, and was distinguished from the other furniture by two "high-seat pillars" standing in front of it, on which was carved the image of some god, usually Thor. These pillars seem to have been entirely separate from the chair, and were of considerable height, sometimes extending to the roof. The seat of the master was perhaps very little, if any, handsomer than others in the room; it was the position it occupied in the room and the fact that it belonged to the head of the house that made the "high seat," the seat of honor.[2] The seat

Seats

Fig. 10. Carved Chair, Back View. (From Du Chaillu's *Viking Age*. Copyright 1889. Published by Charles Scribner's Sons.)

[2] Bååth, *Nordiskt Forntidslif*, 136; Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*,

Fig. 11. Side View of Chair Shown in Fig. 10. (From Du Chaillu's *Viking Age.* Copyright 1889. Published by Charles Scribner's Sons.)

just opposite the high seat on the other platform was usually occupied by the most honored guest; and if there was a dais at the end of the room, the seat occupying the middle position upon it appears to have been third in rank in the room.

The best seats in the grander halls were stuffed and

232; Falk, "Hochsitz," in Hoops, *Reallexikon;* Gudmundsson, *Privatboligen på Island i Sagatiden,* 184–185; *Origines Islandicae,* II, 325.

upholstered in embroidered cloth or leather, or supplied with soft, loose cushions with decorated covers. Sometimes they were made more comfortable by being draped with skins of wolves or bears, or other animals of the chase. In front of them were foot-stools of wood, frequently draped or upholstered to match.

Besides the seats, the only other stationary piece of furniture in the dining-hall appears to have been a table-like sideboard at the far end of the room. Upon this the vat or bowl containing the drink for the meal stood, and from it the beakers and horns were filled.[3]

Sideboards

The tables proper were removable, were not set up until needed, and were taken away at the close of the meal. They consisted of wide boards, placed upon light horses, or trestles, of wood. When not in use, the table-tops were probably hung against the wall of the stofa or of some adjoining room by means of rings attached to the backs. In the more refined households, when set for meals the boards were spread with cloths of white linen, sometimes embroidered, but it is probable that throughout the North as a whole the dishes were placed upon the bare tables.

When needed, the tables seem to have been placed in front of the seats upon the raised floor, the seats themselves not being disturbed. Sometimes, they were set up on top of the wooden platform, or floor, on which were the seats of honor; but often they stood on the shallow, broad step just below. If the guests at a banquet were too numerous to be accommodated on the platform, a row of seats was placed upon the earthen floor, on either side of the long fireplace, and tables were set between these seats and the other tables. As the

[3] Gudmundsson, *Privatboligen på Island i Sagatiden*, 189.

people sat on only one side of the board, this arrangement had somewhat the effect of one wide table, for the guests upon the platform and those down below faced one another. It is likely that on most occasions the boards were placed so closely end to end as virtually to be one long table, but at times an individual board was set up for each person.[4]

The walls and floor of the skali, and of the women's bower, were probably finished and decorated similarly to the stofa, though not so expensively. The beds were of various descriptions. Often, among the humble, they consisted merely of sheepskins or other bedding spread out upon the platform, or set, at night, but kept rolled up against the wall in the daytime. More commonly, perhaps, large boxes filled with straw, hay, moss, or other soft material were placed upon the platform, and bedding was spread in them. Sometimes the boxes were built upon legs, forming a bedstead (Fig. 12). But more elaborate bedsteads were

Beds

Fig. 12. Plain Wooden Bedstead. (From Gustafson's *Norges Oldtid.*)

found in the little "lock-rooms" partitioned off from the remainder of the skali. Some of these had high foot- and head-boards; others were characterized by four tall corner posts; while still others combined the features just mentioned. Such bedsteads were generally ornamented with carving, and occasionally with paint, the

[4] *Ibid.*, 186–191.

figure of Thor being a favorite subject of the decorator.

Even the best beds were perhaps often without regular mattresses, the place of these being taken by having the closed bottom of the bed-frame filled with some soft, springy substance, which could be shaken up every day; but mattresses and bed ticks stuffed with sheeps' wool or feathers, or the cheaper materials used in the box-beds, were also employed. The pillows were filled with down or feathers. Only the better classes made use of sheets, which were of white wadmal or of linen. The bed-covers of the poor were often sheep skins, but they also had heavy woolen blankets or rugs; and the more prosperous kept warm by the latter means, and also by furs, and coverlets filled with down or the best feathers. In the finer homes the beds were covered with spreads of wool or silk, woven or embroidered in bright colors; and about them were draped curtains or canopies to match.

The movable beds were probably placed lengthwise of the wooden platform on which they stood, leaving a narrow aisle along the outer edge; but the box-beds, and the bed-steads, could be set crosswise, and doubtless were at times, even when the raised floor was but six feet wide, or less; for in the Middle Ages the beds were shorter than now, as people slept in a half-sitting position.[5]

Though it was usual everywhere to sit upon the beds, or upon the edge of the set, which was spread with cushions or skins for the purpose, it is probable that the better skalis were furnished with chairs and benches of different sorts. These perhaps usually stood on the

[5] *Ibid.*, 215–222; Visted, Kristofer, *Vor Gamle Bondekultur*, 47; Gustafson, *Norges Oldtid*, 114.

earthen floor, though sometimes a small stool, or chair, on which to put the outer garments, was set by the bed; but the clothes were doubtless more often hung on pegs near at hand.

Chests

Another important class of furniture having a place in the sleeping-hall was the chests in which were kept the clothes, trinkets, jewelry, and money of the different members of the household, though the more valuable and least used clothes and ornaments, were, with most of the money, often locked away in the store-house. These receptacles were usually made from hardwood, and were at times metal bound, and decorated with nail-heads (Fig. 14), or with scroll-work of bronze or iron; but more frequently they were elaborately carved or painted with decorative designs. All chests were fitted with strong locks, often having decorative plates and keys (Fig. 13).

Fig. 13. Bronze Key Ornamented with Animal Design. (From Müller's *Vor Oldtid.*)

The Scandinavian Work Day

The Scandinavian work day varied with the seasons, but it was generally long—especially in the summer, when the daylight was almost continuous, and there was much out-door labor to be done before the winter set in. During this season, the household was perhaps well astir by six o'clock.

Meal-Time

Five meals were eaten during the day, but only two of these were hearty. Promptly upon rising there were light refreshments; then, after two or three hours of work the household gathered for

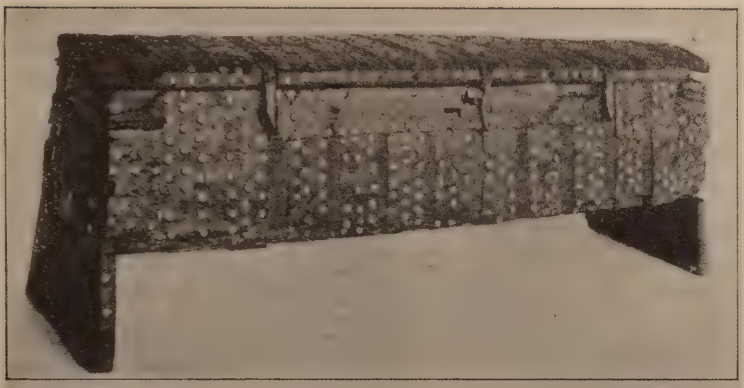


Fig. 14. Iron-bound Oaken Chest Ornamented with Nails. (From Gustafson's *Norges Oldtid*)

Fig. 15. Bucket with Ornamental Ears Decorated with Enamel. (From Bugge's *Norges Historie*)

dagverðr, the heartiest meal of the day. It came at *dagmal,* and corresponded, in time, quite closely with the English or American breakfast; but in its nature, it was more like dinner. At mid-day a luncheon was served, and another, in the middle of the afternoon. *Náttverðr,* the last meal of the day, came, in summer, at *náttmal,* or about nine o'clock in the evening. This was not so hearty as dagverðr, but was usually more elaborate and lengthy, for there was now more time for drinking and social converse. The household appears to have indulged in a short nap some time in the afternoon during the summer; and all probably retired shortly after supper was finished.[6]

As a rule, the housewife supervised the in-door servants, but among the wealthy this was sometimes done by a head slave, or a hired house-keeper. Often the mistress of the house herself, with the aid of her daughters, did all of the domestic work, for there was no stigma attached to manual labor among the ancient Northmen.

Though stone or clay stoves of rude fashion were early in use, most of the cooking was done over a small open fire, in some cases raised a little above the surface of the ground. Turf, peat, wood, and charcoal were the most common fuels, which were generally ignited by means of various primitive devices; but the coals were carefully covered at night in order to save the labor of making new fire. The cook at times set the kettles and skillets directly upon the stones forming the fireplace; but the former, if large, were more often suspended over the fire by means of a crane or by a hook upon a tripod (Fig. 16). In some instances, red-hot stones were employed, as among more primitive

Cooking

[6] Keyser, *Private Life,* 107, 111; Schönfeld, *Der isländische Bauernhof und sein Betreib zur Sagazeit,* 65.

peoples, especially for the heating or cooking of foods, —such as milk,—which might be easily scorched;[7] and they were probably in quite general use in the homes of poverty, for here the chief cooking vessels were of stone or baked clay, which did not stand exposure to direct heat very well. In the North as a whole, however, metal cooking utensils were the rule. These were made of copper, bronze, or iron, at times ornamented, and included pots and kettles of different sizes, and also skillets (Fig. 17) and gridirons. When not in use, utensils were hung from pegs in the eld-hús, or placed upon the shelves there.[8]

Though some of the baking and roasting was done before the open fires or in the ashes, the housewife also used ovens of a primitive character of clay or of unhewn stone built up with clay, in bee-hive shape, like those now found among the Indians of the southwestern United States. They were heated by a fire built in them, as in the Scandinavian brick ovens of the present time, after which the ashes were removed, the food placed inside, and the opening closed by means of a door of stone or metal. Such ovens may still be seen in some old country houses in the Scandinavian North.[9]

Great extremes were displayed in the dishes upon the tables of the very wealthy, and those which did service for the extremely poor; the former sometimes ate from vessels of silver and gold, beautifully chased, while the latter had trenchers or little tubs of wood (Figs. 18–19). Vessels for the table were also made in a rather poor quality of pottery; and there

Dishes

[7] *Ljósvetninga Saga*, 198.

[8] Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 153; Gustafson, *Norges Oldtid*, 114–117; Rygh, O., *Norske Oldsager, ordnede og forklarede*, 23, 37.

[9] Visted, *Vor Gamle Bondekultur*, 34–39.

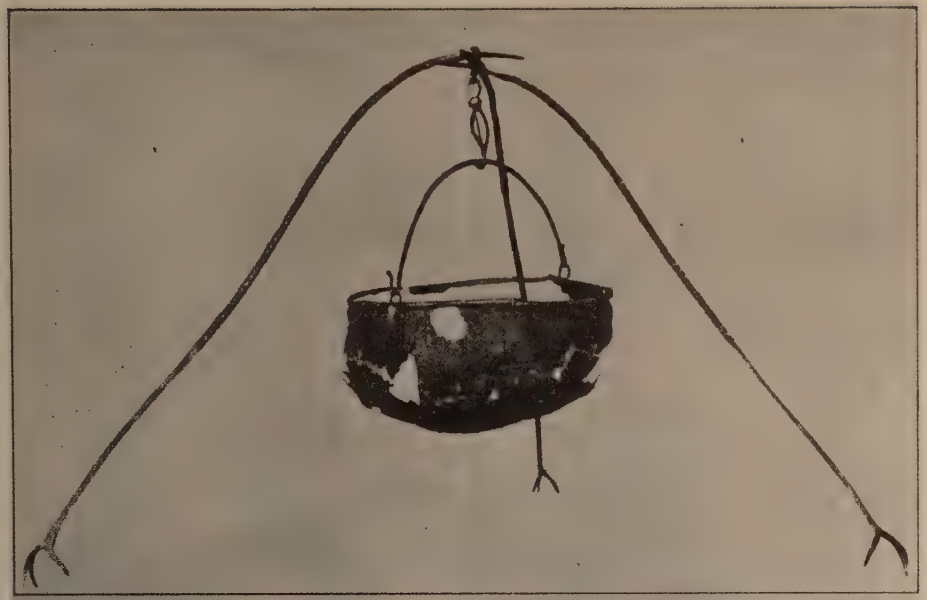


Fig. 16. Iron Kettle with Tripod. (From Gustafson's *Norges Oldtid*)

were individual dishes of the baser metals as well. But in those days, even among the most refined, several people sometimes ate from the same dish. Because of their fondness for drinking, the Northmen appear to have given particular attention to the construction and ornamentation of the vessels in which their beverages were served. Ox horns, variously decorated, were quite common. Sometimes they were carved with designs in low relief, or with runic words of magic import; usually the edge was bound with metal, and occasionally the vessel was supplied with metal feet, enabling it to stand alone on the table. Gold and silver were frequently employed for finishing the horns, and such mountings were often further decorated with enamel, or settings of precious stones. Vessels shaped like horns were made from metals also, and if from gold or silver, they were often richly chased; but in addition to these there were cups, goblets, and beakers of pottery, metal, and glass—the latter generally imported.[10]

Fig. 20. Carved Horn Spoon. From Montelius' *Kulturgeschichte Schwedens.*)

Fingers served as forks in those days, as they did for centuries afterwards in Western Europe; but the knife had more varied use then than now as a table implement. The knives which did service at the table were short, with sharp points and wooden,

[10] Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times,* 151–155; Keyser, *Private Life,* 112–114; Bugge, *Vesterlandenes Indfyldelse,* 172–173.

bone, or horn handles, into which the blades sometimes folded. They were carried by the men upon their persons,—in their wallets, fastened in their belts, or suspended by chains about their necks. Spoons were usually of wood, horn, or bone, ornamented with carving; but some were made from brass, bronze, silver, or gold.[11]

Cupboards do not seem to have come into use before Christian times;[12] previous to this, the dishes were probably kept upon shelves in the kitchen, though the more showy ones may have been exhibited upon racks or shelves in the dining-hall.

Women guests generally sat with the men at banquets, and the whole family commonly sat down to meals together in the homes of the rich; but in humbler circles the men usually ate alone while the women folk served them. In addition to keeping all supplied with food and drink, the duties of the women in refined households included passing around basins and towels before and after meals, in order that the diners might wash their hands. Among the poor, the washing probably took place only before eating, if at all. This custom of thus washing at table obviously rose—in the absence of napkins and finger-bowls—from the fact that the fingers were much used in handling the food.[13]

Foods and their Preparation

In comparison with their general cultural status, the ancient Scandinavians enjoyed a large variety of foods, dishes, and beverages—a fact attributable to their inherent resourcefulness as well as to their commercial activities. The native

[11] Keyser, *Private Life*, 112; *Origines Islandicae*, II, 612; *Saga Library*, II, 162, 217.

[12] Visted, *Vor Gamle Bondekultur*, 52–54.

[13] Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 157; Keyser, *Private Life*, 112, 115; Schönfeld, *Der isländische Bauernhof*, 65.

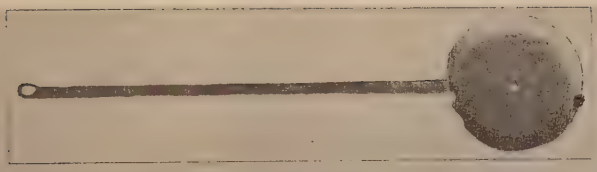


Fig. 17. Skillet with Very Long Handle. (From Gustafson's *Norges Oldtid*)

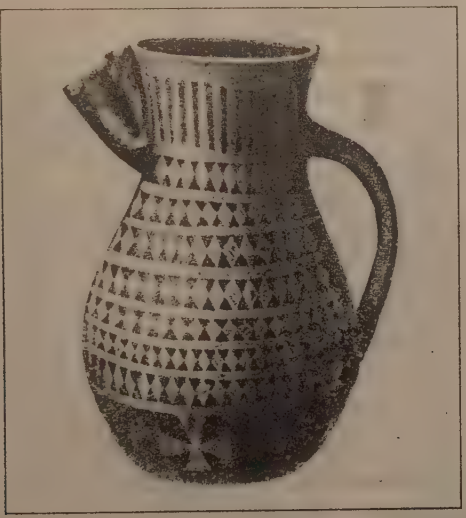


Fig. 18. Decorated Pitcher of Heavy Earthenware. (From Montelius's *Kulturgeschichte Schwedens*)

Fig. 19. Vessels of Chased Silver. (From Steenstrup's *Danmarks Historie*)

foods included meats of various sorts,—the flesh of the horse as well as of other domestic animals,—and also a great diversity of fish and game; eggs from wild fowl in addition to those from the farm-poultry; milk and milk-products, from which many sorts of dishes were prepared; several kinds of cereals; a few varieties of fruits, nuts, and vegetables; and honey, from wild and domestic bees, which appears to have been the only sweet known to the majority of the population.

Salt

Salt was not considered as indispensable as at present, perhaps because it could be secured only by laborious processes and was quite expensive. A fair amount was imported from abroad, but Denmark, particularly Jutland, and some other parts of the North had salt springs, from which the best quality of "white" salt was made. That most frequently used, however, especially in Iceland and Norway, was produced from sea-water, and was known as "black" salt. The sea-salt was obtained in various ways: by directly evaporating the water by exposure to sunshine or by boiling; by throwing it upon hot rocks or burning wood; and by burning sea-weed, which is always rich in salt—the last method being the common one in Iceland. Some people made their livings by the manufacture of salt after these primitive modes; but it was a very poor and humble calling, and the salt-burner was looked upon as a type of the person lowest in the social scale.[14]

Meats

Some kinds of meats, particularly fish, were eaten raw after being dried, smoked, or pickled. There were two methods of pickling—laying the pieces in brine, which was perhaps the least usual; and putting them in very sour whey, which did service

[14] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 90–91; "Salt," in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary.

for vinegar, and was cheap. Food thus treated would keep for a long time. Most of the flesh foods were, however, probably cooked before being eaten, perhaps most often by boiling, though they were also roasted, fried, and broiled. The usual sauce appears to have been butter, which was especially liked with fish, but it is probable that gravies, thickened with flour or meal, were not unknown. Certain vegetables, as, leeks and angelica, were used as relishes with meat.[15]

Eggs were usually cooked and eaten soon after being gathered, but there were doubtless ways of keeping them for a long time raw; and they were also pickled in whey, like meats, after having been hard-boiled and shelled.[16]

Milk and Milk-Products

The milk of goats and sheep, as well as of cows, was used as food in ancient Scandinavia. While sweet, it was drunk, cold or hot, by young and old alike; and when sour it was also used as a beverage. Buttermilk was also much liked, but the most common milk drink appears to have been whey, which was relished old and sour, as well as fresh, for a supply of it might be kept for years. When it became disagreeably tart, however, it was diluted, or blended, with water, from which it was called *blanda*. The Northmen were fond of clabbered milk raw, but it was perhaps more often eaten after being made into curds by the application of heat, very much like "cottage cheese" of the present day. In the latter form, it was mixed with sweet milk, cream, butter, or crushed berries. A great variety of cheeses were made from the three kinds of milk used and the dairy maid increased the diversity by the employment of vegetable flavorings, as

[15] Gudmundsson and Kålund, "Skandinavische Verhältnisse," in Paul, *Grundriss der germanischen Philologie*, III, 448; Schönfeld, *Der isländische Bauernhof*, 189.

[16] Olassen and Povelsen, *Reise durch Island*, I, 258.

well as by different processes in the making. Butter was also made in abundance, and used very freely in the preparation of various dishes, as has just been indicated; but it was also spread upon bread. It was, however, rarely, or never, salted; and though sometimes partaken of when fresh and sweet, it was more often permitted to become sour and rancid before using, and the more sour it was, the better it was liked. After becoming thus old and seasoned, it would keep for many years, and appears to have been especially prized as a sauce with fish and other foods.[17]

Cereal Foods

All of the common cereals were grown in Scandinavia, but climate permitted greater variety and abundance in some parts than in others; and to certain sections wheat, especially, had to be imported. But in Iceland, where this grain could not be produced, Nature offered compensations, for here, along the coasts, grew a native grass somewhat like wild oats, the seeds of which could be used for food like the domesticated cereals; and it is probable that the nutritive qualities of the lichen called "Iceland moss" which grows upon the highlands had already been discovered before the close of the viking time.

The grains were ground in hand mills of which there were two or three styles. The ones used in the humbler households were quite small, and shaped of stone after the simple mortar and pestle principle, like those used by the American Indians; but the larger farms had more complex structures, made from two heavy stones, the one placed upon the other, and the top one supplied with a wooden or metal handle. This latter style of mill was

[17] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben,* 144; Olassen and Povelsen, *Reise durch Island,* I, 13; Pinkerton, *Voyages and Travels,* I, 656, 749.

usually worked by two persons, as a rule, women, who turned the stones to the accompaniment of special milling songs, as is customary in Iceland even to-day.[18]

From the ground cereals the women made various kinds of breads, some baked in thin, flat cakes, similar to the present Swedish flat-bread, before the open fire, and others kneaded into loaves and baked in the home-made ovens already described. Whether yeast was used is not evident, but it probably was, since the fermentation principle was well known in connection with brewing ale. But if the Scandinavian housewives had not learned thus to leaven their bread, they doubtless knew how to make it light by means of sour dough, which had fermented and "risen," used like yeast—a method quite familiar to many primitive peoples. They probably also prepared fancy breads from their leavened batter by the addition of butter, honey, fruits and nuts.

Much of the home-milled meal was used for porridge, called *graut*,—a favorite dish of the Northmen,—for the cooking of which an unusually large kettle was provided. Barley, oats, rye, and wheat, were made into graut, and probably the wild grains and the starchy Iceland moss already mentioned were also used, for they are so employed in modern times. The meal was cooked in milk as well as in water, and was eaten with milk, cream, or whey, or with butter or berries spread over it. This porridge perhaps was the main supper dish in the North a thousand years ago, as it is now in many parts of Scandinavia.[19]

The only fruit in domestication throughout the Scandinavian North was the apple, which could be stored away for winter use, and was eaten raw or cooked. But

[18] Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 175.

[19] Schönfeld, *Der isländische Bauernhof*, 25; *Origines Islandicae*, II, 612.

a diversity of edible berries grew wild in great abundance, even under the Arctic Circle; these included several well-known varieties, as well as some kinds peculiar to the Far North. The berries, perhaps more than apples, were combined with other foods in preparation for the table, but there is no evidence that the people had learned how to preserve them for winter use. The hazel shrub grew extensively in Scandinavia, and its nuts were appreciated as a food;[20] the same was true of the nut of the beech tree, while the acorn was also eaten, at least among the very poor.

Fruits and Nuts

There were a number of vegetables in domestication in the North even in the heathen days, and these were augmented in the early Christian time. They included some members of the cabbage family, beans, peas, turnips, leeks and angelica. The last two were largely used as relishes, but angelica, which was grown at least in Iceland and Norway—probably in the remainder of Scandinavia as well—was also eaten raw as a sort of salad, and was likewise cooked. The stalks, cut in small pieces crosswise, appear to have been the part of the plant chiefly used, and these were eaten with butter.[21] Various wild plants were probably boiled in water and eaten as "greens"; and in Iceland at least one uncultivated plant, the *söl,* or samphire, was an important article of diet, and was stored away for winter use. This plant grows on the coasts of the island, generally along the margin of the water, and was considered so valuable as a food, even in the olden time, that

Vegetables

[20] *Origines Islandicae,* I, 276.

[21] *Norges Gamle Love,* I, 205; *Valdemar den Andens Jydske Lov,* 274; Gudmundsson, "Gartenbau," in Hoops, *Reallexikon;* Olassen and Povelsen, *Reise durch Island,* I, 84–85.

prohibitions are found in the most ancient law-code of Iceland against gathering either it or wild berries upon the land of another. The leaves, which are rich in sugar, are the edible part, and were eaten raw, when fresh, as a relish with fish, but were also dried and packed away in kegs or vats, for winter use. After this treatment the söl was cooked as a separate dish, as well as eaten with butter as a relish for other foods.[22]

Beverages

As is still the case through almost the whole of Europe, water, unmixed with anything else, was rarely used as a beverage in the Scandinavia of the Viking Age. Milk and by-products of milk, especially whey—as already stated—constituted the common daily drinks of all except the wealthy; but in addition there were alcoholic beverages of various sorts, the most common of these being ale, for the making of which hops early came to be cultivated in the North. The most important brewing time was just before the mid-winter feast. Mead, made from the honey of the bee, was much more rare than ale; and wine, imported from the South—particularly from France—could be afforded only by the rich.[23]

Illumination

Except upon special festive occasions and during the meals eaten when there was not sufficient daylight, the only illumination of the stofa was provided by the open fire burning upon the long hearths. But occasionally other means of illumination were employed for this room, and for the other parts of the house. At best, however, the arti-

[22] Beeby, W. H., "Söl and Samphire," in *Saga Book*, VI, 209–211; "Söl," in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary; Schönfeld, *Der isländische Bauernhof*, 38–40.

[23] Schönfeld, *Der isländische Bauernhof*, 66; Steenstrup, *Normannerene*, I, 185–186; Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 157; Horrebow, Niels, *Natural History of Iceland*, 53.

ficial light was poor, and therefore, very little fine work was attempted in the evenings. The simplest light of all was the torch made from a pine-knot, or from a piece of pitchy wood; this was used to carry about the dwelling as well as for illumination of a certain part. Many of the poorest people living in the interior of the Scandinavian lands knew no other light, and it was also very common in the homes of the wealthy, but in parts of the North, lamps—some of them following Roman models—were in use in the viking period. One style resembled that now seen among the Eskimo, who appear to have secured their ideas for it from the Scandinavians who settled in Greenland in the tenth century.[24] The lamp in question was an open dish, without burner, and had a floating wick made from rushes or cloth—perhaps most often the former. Below the vessel containing the oil was another of the same shape, used for catching the drippings. The two receptacles were fastened together by an upright piece of metal. The materials used for the lamps were pottery, soapstone, brass, copper, bronze, or iron; and the oil burned in them was generally obtained from fish, or from sea-mammals, such as the whale and the seal. Lamps of this general style were in common use in recent years in the Orkney Islands and in Northern Scotland.[25] Two varieties are known to have been used by the ancient Northmen, the one had a hook or handle attached, by means of which it could be suspended, and the other had a long projecting shaft at the side which could be thrust into crevices in the walls.

[24] Tylor, "Old Scandinavian Civilization among the Modern Eskimo," in *Jr. Anthrop. Inst.* of Gt. Brit. and Ire., XIII, 252–253; Garson, "Lamps from the Orkney Islands," in *Jr. Anthrop Inst.* of Gt. Brit. and Ire., XIII, 275.

[25] *Ibid.* These were known in Scotland as collie lamps, from the Old Norse name, *kola.*

A simpler type consisted of a single metal cup with a spikelike projection for holding it in place.[26]

Such lamps were easily transformed into lanterns by surrounding them with a framework set with pieces of thin horn, or covered with translucent membrane from an animal, such as was used for windows. Lanterns of this sort, probably from English models, were used in Scandinavia in the late Viking Age.[27]

There is no certainty that candles came into use in the North before the last half of the eleventh century, though it is probable that the idea of making them from tallow and beeswax was introduced from the south of Europe much earlier than this. Yet, if so, they cannot have been extensively employed for illumination in the heathen time. But with the adoption of Christianity and the use of candles in the churches, they were soon introduced into private houses, at least among the prosperous.

[26] Falk, "Beleuchtung," in Hoops, *Reallexikon;* Visted, *Vor Gamle Bondekultur*, 33–34; Gustafson, *Norges Oldtid*, 107, 113; *Norges Gamle Love*, III, 247.

[27] *Norges Gamle Love*, II, 247.

CHAPTER X

AGRICULTURE AND THE ROUTINE OF FARM LIFE

Fair is the Lithe; so fair that it has never seemed to me so fair; the grain fields are white to harvest, and the home mead is mown; and now I will ride back home, and not fare abroad at all.

Saga of Burnt Njal.

Importance of Agriculture

So much has been said of the ancient Scandinavians as piratical warriors and shrewd foreign traders that the fact that, after all, most of their energy was devoted to peaceful pursuits is likely to be overlooked. The most important of the domestic occupations was agriculture, which included pasturage and tillage of the soil. But in the cultivation of his acres the primary object of the farmer was to secure feed for his livestock, upon which his subsistence largely depended and his chances for acquiring wealth rested. In other words, animal husbandry was of more importance than grain-growing. The former industry especially dominated in Iceland, and in Northern Sweden and Norway, where cereals could be produced only with difficulty. And even in Greenland there were sunny slopes and sheltered meadows in which hay could be successfully harvested, for in this bleak land also stock-raising flourished a thousand years ago.[1]

Yet the diversity of agriculture at this time, even in Iceland, is attested by the fact that here, as upon every fair-sized farm in continental Scandinavia, were found

[1] Nansen, *In Northern Mists*, I, 272, 276.

tracts of pasture, hay-meadows, hay-fields, and fields for growing cereals; and, in addition, a small portion of the land was generally set apart for fruit- and vegetable-growing. These different agricultural units of the farmstead were probably set off from one another by hedges of natural shrubbery, walls of stone or turf, or fences made from pickets or rails.

But the existence of mountain pastures in Iceland and Norway, and to some extent in Sweden, indicates the emphasis placed upon raising livestock, particularly cattle. Here, in the highlands, were the community lands already mentioned in another connection; but every farmer possessing a right to graze his livestock in these pastures appears to have been permitted to set apart a small tract on which to erect sheep folds and cattle pens, and buildings for dairy purposes and for temporary dwellings. Such structures were very rough as a rule, for they were not looked upon as homes, but as mere makeshifts, as are the farming camps in the western United States at the present time; they were generally built of stone and turf, like the *sel* and the *saetr* still found in the mountains of Iceland and Norway.

Several kinds of crops were grown in the fields of the ancient Northland, including oats, barley, rye, and wheat.

Grain and Hay-Farming

Even far up the bleak coast of Norway, in the region of the present Tromsö, the inhabitants produced some grain, for home consumption; but this did not include wheat, which was largely restricted to Denmark and southern Sweden; and the bulk of the cereal output of Scandinavia came from these two regions as well. Vetches were grown for fodder, in Iceland, and probably elsewhere; and here the straw from the wild strand-grass (*melr*) previously mentioned, was likewise used for stock

feed. In other parts of Scandinavia were different kinds of undomesticated grasses which were cut for hay.[2]

Besides the cereals and the plants grown for fodder, some textile plants were cultivated in the Northland even centuries before the historical period, but not in sufficient quantities to do away with the necessity for importation. These included flax and hemp, and also a variety of burning nettle, from which a coarse cloth was made. The plants mentioned had, in general, the same care as the cereals.[3]

Textile Plants

Only the best land was cultivated, and even this in the rock-bound Scandinavian peninsula, and to some degree in the remainder of the North, had usually to be cleared of stones before it could be plowed. In the Far North the farmer selected the most sheltered places in which to plant cereals which were expected to reach maturity; and in Iceland, furthermore, the vicinities of hot-springs and geysers were chosen for grain fields, whenever possible. Each field was divided into a number of strips separated by furrows, and in the best agricultural communities these were given three plowings, one in the autumn and two in the spring. Seeding time ranged from the last of April to the last of May, according to the location and the severity of the weather in a given year; rye, however, and probably wheat also, was occasionally sown in the autumn.[4]

Conditions Favorable to Planting

The agricultural implements were simple and somewhat crude, but they satisfied the needs of the time. For the preparation of the soil, the husbandman used a hoe

[2] Gudmundsson, "Akerbau," in Hoops, *Reallexikon; Njála*, 292; "Melr," in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary.

[3] Gudmundsson, "Akerbau," in Hoops, *Reallexikon.*

[4] *Ibid.*

Agricultural Implements

or spade, with blade of hard wood or iron, or a plow, of which in the saga time there were two kinds in use. The more primitive was called an *arðr,* and may be seen represented upon the ancient rock-carvings. The implement, like the name, was Scandinavian in origin, and was somewhat of the nature of the modern grubbing plow; but the share, or cutting edge, was as a rule of wood, though

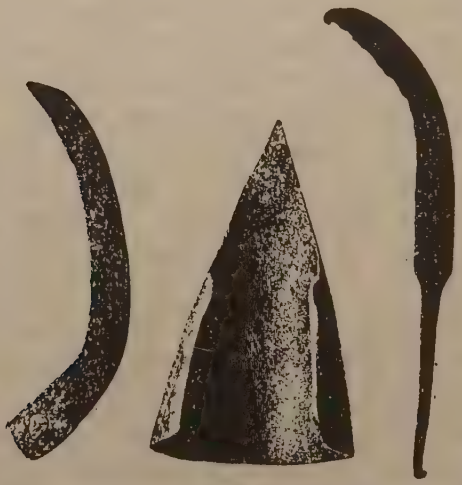


Fig. 21. Two Types of Sickles, and a Plow Iron. (From Gustafson's *Norges Oldtid.*)

at times shod with iron (Fig. 21). In some cases the arðr was probably provided with wheels, and it was drawn by two animals, generally oxen, for the latter, much more than horses, were employed in agriculture. The other plow, known as *plógr,* was, as the name indicates, of foreign origin or influence, and probably did not come into use in Scandinavia until after the opening of the viking period. Just what was its nature is not

clear, but it was distinct from the earlier plow and was doubtless an improvement upon it. Its shape was probably not unlike that of the single plows used at the present day.[5] The seed was scattered by hand from a basket carried upon the arm, or by means of a small hand seeder, built upon the sieve principle; and it was covered by dragging a brushy tree or tree branch over the field, or by the use of a simple rake or harrow of wood.

The grain and hay crops were cut with a short, curved sickle, similar to those now seen in Scandinavian harvest fields of the remoter parts (Fig. 21); and they were gathered into heaps with rakes and pitchforks, sometimes of iron, but more frequently of wood.

There was very little science in the agriculture of the time; but it seems likely that by casual observation and experimentation the Scandinavians had learned something of the advantage to be gained from the rotation of crops, and from permitting lands to lie fallow. The only fertilizer used, as far as is known, was manure from the stables. Generally, rain and snow supplied sufficient moisture directly to the soil, but occasionally droughts came, and then, wherever possible, the farmers irrigated their fields by damming the streams.[6]

Harvesting

Haying time and harvest ranged from early in July to late in September. The crop in the infield or homefield near the house, which was usually earliest planted, was the first to be cut. If the meadows and grain fields lay at some distance from the house, to save time, the harvesters set up a temporary establishment near the scene of their labors and camped

[5] *Ibid.;* Bugge, *Norges Historie,* vol. I, pt. II, 240; "Arðr" and "Plógr," in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary.

[6] Gudmundsson, "Akerbau," in Hoops, *Reallexikon; Origines Islandicae,* I, 107.

out in tents. Most of the planting was done by the men, but so much depended upon getting the crops cut, dried, and under shelter while the weather was good that generally the whole family turned out to work in the harvest fields; when circumstances demanded it, even wives and daughters from rich homes lent their aid. The men cut the grain, and women and children bound it into sheaves, raked and spread the hay, and helped with the pitching. As clear summer weather is very uncertain in Scandinavia, every effort was made to get the hay dry as soon as possible. If it lay upon the ground it was turned once or twice a day; but it seems probable that, as at the present time in the Northland, it was frequently placed upon racks or trays, or over clothes-line-like arrangements, or bound into sheaves and then spitted upon sharp sticks stuck in the ground, in order that the air might circulate through it more freely, and the drying process be thus hastened.[7]

When dry, the hay was piled upon high ground, after which it was placed under shelter as soon as possible. If the fields were not far from home, the hay and grain were hauled there upon wagons or sleds generally drawn by oxen; but if they were at some distance, particularly in Iceland, it was tied upon the backs of horses, and thus transported. The grain was stored away in the barns until winter brought more leisure, when it was threshed with flails upon a special floor, sometimes by the aid of artificial light. After being freed from the chaff, the seed was deposited in bins or sacks in the granary. There were usually barns for the hay also, but when these were filled the surplus was stacked in a special yard sur-

[7] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 38; Schönfeld, *Der isländische Bauernhof*, 121; Henderson, *Iceland*, I, 364.

rounded by high walls, and the tops covered with boards, turf, or skins.[8]

Shortage of hay through drought or from its being spoilt by rains after being cut was a very real calamity. If such a scarcity appeared and fodder could not be secured for money, it was necessary to kill some of the livestock, in order that there be sufficient feed for the remainder. This last resort sometimes threatened the food-supply of the people themselves as well as reduced their incomes. Therefore, every effort was made to keep the animals alive, if possible; and, in consequence, they were taught to eat quite unusual foods. Dried fish was upon occasions the fare of both horses and cattle in Iceland, and cattle ate even fish-bones after they had been cooked soft, and drank the water in which fish had been boiled.[9]

Horticulture was much less advanced than grain-growing. Yet a beginning had been made. Close to the dwelling house of the Northman stood his orchard and his vegetable garden, which, though they contained but little variety, were of so much value to their owners as to be subjects of protective legislation.[10] The common vegetables of the North—perhaps the only ones—were cabbage, beans, peas, turnips, leeks, and angelica, and the Far North probably did not have all of these.[11] Obviously, the quality must have been in most cases inferior to that of the same vegetables at the present time.

Horticulture

[8] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 65; II, 110, 117; *Saga Library*, II, 76; IV, 35; Schönfeld, E. Dagobert, *Das Pferd im Dienste des Isländers zur Sagazeit*, 28; Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 175.

[9] *Horrebow, Natural History of Iceland*, 52; Nansen, *In Northern Mists*, I, 276.

[10] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 253; *Valdemar den Andens Jydske Lov*, 274.

[11] *Ibid.;* Gudmundsson, Valtyr, "Gartenbau," in Hoops, *Reallexikon.*

As was stated in the last chapter, the apple was the only widely distributed domestic fruit, but plums were probably grown to some extent. However, such cultivated fruits as existed in the North were doubtless very mediocre, for we have no evidence that the growers had as yet learned to improve size and quality by means of careful selection of seeds or by grafting. Though there appear not to have been any domestic berries, it is reasonable to suppose that occasionally wild berry plants were included in the gardens of people living at a distance from where they were found in their native state.[12]

Also near the house, and perhaps within the protection of the orchard wall, stood the hives where the bees in the summer time stored away the precious honey, which was the substitute for sugar as well as sirup. Bees were raised in southern Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, but more was made of the industry in the last-named country, for the province of Vermland was early famous for its bee culture. Iceland was forced to import her honey, as did Norway to some degree.[13]

Bee-Culture

The superior importance of animal husbandry in Scandinavian agriculture has been mentioned. All of the common domestic animals were bred there, but in some parts certain kinds were of more consequence than in other sections. In the northern part of the Scandinavian peninsula the people of Norse blood, as well as their Lapp, or Finn, neighbors, raised large herds of reindeer; in southern Sweden and Denmark a value was attached to swine which was not recognized in other sections; while the ancient saying in Iceland, "a sheepless household starves," in-

Animal Husbandry: Live Stock

[12] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 253.
[13] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 89.

dicates the importance attached to the sheep in that place, where some farmers owned thousands of head. In Norway sheep were also highly regarded, but perhaps cattle were the chief domestic animals in that country. And throughout the North, as a whole, cattle and sheep were bred in the largest numbers and had more significance, commercially, than any of the other kinds of livestock. Goats were less numerous than sheep, but were also less expensive, because of the inferiority of their fleece. They gave more milk than sheep, however, and were consequently a great boon to those in humble circumstances; he who could not afford even a goat was poor indeed. Horses were especially beloved, but were not thought of in terms of wealth to such a degree as some of the other animals; neither were they so indispensable, and it is probable that the possession of them was largely restricted to the well-to-do.

All of the domestic animals, with the exception of the horse, appear to have been of rather ordinary breeds, similar or inferior to the livestock found in the more backward districts of the Scandinavian lands in modern times. Some of the horses, however, were much larger and finer than the common ponies now used in Iceland and Norway. This was perhaps due to the fact that the Northmen took special pride in fine-appearing horses, and were also fond of horse-racing and horse-fighting; and hence, the animals were bred for points. Southern Sweden, in particular, was famous for the quality of its horses.[14]

Domestic fowls of the usual sorts were found in the North also, perhaps the most important being geese, of which some farmers had large flocks, cared for by herders, usually children.

[14] *Ibid.*, 47; Nansen, *In Northern Mists*, I, 276.

The proportional distribution of the livestock was largely determined by the question of feed. The reindeer could largely shift for themselves, and subsisted upon the moss and the meager grass supply of the Arctic belt; but the other animals required that more provision be made for them. However, at times, even in Iceland they were permitted to forage out of doors in the winter during the day, thus supplementing the store of fodder in the barns. This was especially true of the sheep, which in some years could almost support themselves upon the grass obtained by pawing aside the snow; but the ancient records also mention lost cows and pigs that lived out in the open for many years and throve and multiplied.[15] Yet even when the snow was not too deep utterly to shut the wild grass away from the animals, the supply, in winter, was always quite inadequate for the needs of a community. Hence the importance of filling the barns with fodder against this time of need.

But in the summer it was quite different, for then the horses and cattle were turned out to graze in the common or private pastures, or the stubble-fields; and the swine were permitted to roam in the forests in search of grasses and roots, and the more prized acorns and beech nuts. Sometimes a herder—usually a slave—with the aid of a dog, watched over the animals as they grazed in the community pasture, but often they were left to themselves during the entire summer.

The Mountain Pastures

As soon as the grass was high enough in the mountains, the cows, sheep, and goats—less often horses and swine—were taken up there to graze upon the community land. Generally they could not go before July; but if hay had been made from some of the grass the preceding sum-

[15] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 30, 92, 129, 149.

mer and stored away in the mountain barns, the transfer took place as soon as the snow was melted. As a rule, only a part of the household moved to the summer camp, most often some of the servants under the supervision of a member of the family; but sometimes the whole family moved up, for the sake of the change of environment and climate as well as for the purpose of aiding with the work.[16]

Part of the livestock were permitted to roam freely in the mountain pastures the whole summer, but those which gave milk were supervised by herders and were brought into the inclosures at the sel, or mountain camp, every night to be milked by the women. The women also busied themselves with making and caring for the butter and cheese, while the men appear to have done most of the herding, and mended the farm buildings, and made hay.

In September when the harvest was over and winter approached, the herdsmen gathered all of the animals from the mountain pastures into a common inclosure, and afterwards separated them into private herds with the aid of the identification marks upon them; the women stowed away in baskets and skin bags the butter and cheese, curds and whey, which had been made from the summer milk; these supplies were then loaded upon pack-animals; the sel was closed for the winter, and the whole household returned to the more pretentious and comfortable homes in the lowlands.[17]

The removal of the much-prized wool from the sheep was an important part of the summer's work, and probably always took place before the flocks were removed

[16] Schönfeld, *Das Pferd*, 26.

[17] Schönfeld, *Der isländische Bauernhof*, 8–10, 181–183, 205–206; *Saga Library*, III, 267.

to the mountains. Judging from the methods still in use in Iceland in the eighteenth century, the fleece was not clipped off, but was plucked out by the handful, as soon as the animals began to shed their coats—a laborious method which gave much discomfort to the sheep.[18]

Wool-Plucking

Many regulations concerning domestic animals are to be found in the ancient law codes, and these show strong common sense and a strict regard for justice. The owners were generally responsible for damage done by their animals to persons and property; but if the injury was caused through some other person's failing to fasten the gate to the inclosure where the animals were, that person must, according to the Norwegian law, pay the damages. Livestock were apparently marked all over Scandinavia, but special emphasis was placed upon identification marks in Iceland, perhaps because of the importance of the mountain pastures held and used in common. The oldest laws of the land made any person who had not marked his young cattle and sheep by the close of eight weeks of summer liable to the payment of a heavy fine. These animals must be marked on the ear, as must pigs; and geese and ducks had the identification marks of the owner cut upon the webs of the feet.[19]

Legislation Concerning Domestic Animals

It was the duty of persons to whose farms stray livestock came to make every effort to find the owner. This was generally done by means of an announcement at the meeting of the thing or at the temple or church, and sometimes the law required that the finder take the animal to these gatherings in order that the owner might

[18] Olassen and Povelsen, *Reise durch Island*, I, 107; Henderson, *Iceland*, II, 157.

[19] *Grágás*, IV, 153–159, 186–187.

claim it. The code of the Island of Gotland was unusually specific. Small, unmarked animals must be taken to the church and thing meeting, and if the owner was found he must pay the costs; larger animals need not be taken to the church, but must be taken to two local political assemblies and one general one, and the person who brought it should receive pay from the owner, if found; if not found, the people of the parish assessed the value of the animals, sold them, paid the finder for his trouble, and divided the remainder of the money among themselves.[20]

The Gotland law also provided that purchasers be given a period of a few days in which to test the qualities of domestic animals which they bought, at the expiration of which time they must pay for or return them.[21]

Other Summer Work

There were many other occupations pursued upon the medieval Scandinavian farm than those thought of as specifically agricultural. But because of the climate these were seasonal—summer work and winter work. The former was such as must be done out of doors; the latter included virtually all other work. Because of the great length of the days, as well as the advantage of working in the daylight, servants in Iceland, though hired for the year, were given twice as much pay for the six summer months as they were for the winter months.[22] And it is probable that the other countries recognized the industrial advantages of summer time after a similar fashion.

The out-door tasks included washing the clothes; preparing and bringing home the year's supply of fuel; aug-

[20] *Guta-Lagh*, 78–81.
[21] *Ibid.*, 67–70.
[22] Schönfeld, *Der isländische Bauernhof*, 78.

menting the stores of food obtained from field and dairy by hunting and fishing and gathering edible wild plants; making and mending fences and roads; erecting new buildings; and repairing the ravages caused by the storms of winter upon the old ones.

Laundry Work

Though some clothes-washing may have taken place in the middle of the winter, in preparation for the Yule festivities, the chief laundering time was the summer, as is still true in the remoter parts of Scandinavia. With the coming of bright, dry weather and the disappearance of the ice, the soiled clothes which had been stored away until now, were taken out by the women and carried to the margins of streams and lakes, where they scrubbed them clean aided by soap and ash-lye.

After being dried by spreading upon the grass or racks erected for the purpose, or upon lines in a drying shed, the garments and household linen were smoothed with implements of glass, wood, or whalebone, which, evidently in a very inadequate manner, did the work of the modern flat iron.[23]

Securing and Preparing the Fuel Supply

In the heavily-forested parts of continental Scandinavia it was a comparatively easy matter to secure the year's supply of fuel, for practically everybody owned forest land or a share in a forest. But in scantily-wooded regions, like Iceland and the northern parts of Norway and Sweden, to secure the means whereby the food might be cooked and the dwelling rooms kept warm was often a difficult task. In these parts, such shrubs and trees as were too small for building purposes, or were not desired for use in building, were cut for fire-wood direct, or converted into charcoal; and

[23] Gustafson, *Norges Oldtid*, 107, 112; Rygh, *Norske Oldsager*, 23–24.

in places where no wood could be obtained, various substitutes were employed. The most common of these were turf or peat, obtained from the bogs in the low lands. The former was cut into short strips, dried, and carried home, in Iceland, in baskets placed on either side of a pack-horse. Where both forest and bog were lacking, the people were forced to resort to the use of dried seaweed and other unsatisfactory materials.[24]

Special Winter Work

The special winter occupations included spinning and weaving and making clothes, threshing grain, tanning hides, making ropes from hemp or skin, carving wood, and working in metals. Many of these tasks were probably done by artificial light, but some of them could be worked at by the mere glow from the fire.

Fig. 22. Anvil, Casting Ladle, Hammers and Axes. (From Steenstrup's *Danmarks Historie.*)

Work in Metals

The different varieties of indoor work mentioned in the preceding paragraph which deserve further consideration are given more detailed treatment under other headings, except metal-smithing, which will be taken up here. A large

[24] Olassen and Povelsen, *Reise durch Island*, I, 233.

portion of the metal articles used in the North were home-made, and showed a considerable degree of skill. Some of these were wrought from native red iron ore, or haematite, but most of the metal used by native workers came from abroad, raw, or in the form of objects later melted and worked over.[25] Upon every farm of fair size was a special smithy, adequately equipped with tongs, files, chisels, and shears, and hammers and anvils of different sizes. The larger anvils were shaped from stone, and the smaller, from iron. The bellows, constructed from skin and wood, were worked with two handles, like the small ones now used for blowing open-grate fires in dwelling houses (Figs. 22–24).[26]

Fig. 23. Blacksmith's Tongs, Shears and other Tools. (From Steenstrup's *Danmarks Historie.*)

Though the ancient smiths could shape iron only by forging it, they cast bronze and silver and other soft metals in molds of clay, stone, and iron, but the labor required for shaping the molds as well as the difficulty experienced in attempting to melt the metals, probably discouraged the use of casting to any large extent, for very few samples of cast work have been found.

[25] Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 171.

[26] *Ibid.*, 168; *Egils Saga*, 93; Rygh, *Norske Oldsager*, fig. 388, and *passim*.

CHAPTER XI

HUNTING, FOWLING, AND FISHING

I launched my boat in Largo Bay,
And fishes caught I three;
One for *wad* and one for *hook*,
And one was left for *me*.

From an old Scottish ballad showing Scandinavian influence.

A THOUSAND years ago the Scandinavian waters teemed with fish to an even greater degree than at present, and an abundance of game was found in virtually every part of the land. Hence, many Northmen eked out their larders and added to their wealth by taking toll from the wild life about them. And the humbler people in the more out-of-the-way parts lived, in many instances, entirely upon hunting; the wild land- and water-animals supplied not only food and the means with which to secure other necessaries, but largely clothing, as well. The Skridfinns, or Lapps, were probably the greatest nimrods of all. They pursued the chase not only for the sake of securing a livelihood and commercial gain, but also in order to pay the tribute of skins and furs exacted from them by the Northern chieftains of Germanic blood who lived upon their frontiers. These nomadic hunters appear to have especially excelled in catching sea mammals, and to have given some of their skill to their blonde neighbors.[1]

Importance of Wild Animal Life

[1] Nansen, *In Northern Mists*, I, 224–225.

Among the more prosperous, hunting was primarily a summer occupation, and the special hunter whom many people employed was, in winter, given some indoor work. But those to whom it was a means of livelihood hunted all the year round, pursuing their quarry by following, upon skees, their tracks in the snow, and taking advantage of the tameness to which hunger, caused by the heavy sheet of snow and ice, reduced the game.

Hunting

The animals usually sought were common deer, reindeer, elks, wild hogs, wolves, martens, otters, sables, lynxes, wild cats, squirrels, hares, brown bears, polar bears, and various kinds of foxes. Most of these animals were found in continental Scandinavia, while only a few were native to Iceland. The white bear, on the other hand, was limited to Greenland and Iceland. But it was only a temporary visitor to the latter place, to which it came as a passenger in the winter and springtime upon floating Greenland ice. And such visits caused considerable uneasiness in the minds of the Iceland farmers, for if the animals once landed they were likely to work havoc in the sheep-folds. Consequently, the people living along the north and west coasts kept a sharp lookout when the icebergs began to arrive, and if a bear was known to have come with them, a hunt was immediately begun.[2]

The customary hunting weapons were the bow—generally made from the wood of the yew tree—and arrow, the club, and the spear; the last being employed only for large game. The hunter was, in addition, always equipped with a short, sharp hunting knife, which he used for attacking at short range, especially in self-de-

[2] Olassen and Povelsen, *Reise durch Island*, I, 276; Henderson, *Iceland*, I, 355–356.

fense, and also for skinning and cutting up the animals when killed. The trained hunting dog was the invaluable companion of the Scandinavian hunter; he scared the game out of its hiding place, helped his master by chasing and worrying it, and brought the smaller animals to him after they had been shot. There was probably more than one kind of dog used for such purposes. In Dahlsland, Sweden, the hunting dog was especially large and powerful. It had long gray hair, with dark markings, and was probably related to the Saint Bernard. This animal was also highly prized in Norway, where it had been introduced from Sweden; while in Denmark, the ancestors of the breed now known as Danish were probably the favorite hunters.[3]

Trapping

Animals were brought down not only by means of the chase, but by use of traps of various sorts, as well; and the latter method, as the simpler and easier of the two, was perhaps the more common. Elks were caught in pits dug for the purpose; smaller and less clumsy game, such as wolves and deer, were often lured by the use of bait into high inclosures built of strong palings, after which the gate was closed and the animal slaughtered. The Northmen constructed spring traps of one sort or another, especially for the fox and other small game; and fashioned nets and spread them on the forest trails frequented by the prey.[4]

Hunting Laws

In the legislation of the early Christian period there were laws for the regulation of hunting, many of which doubtless originated far back in the pagan time. It was dangerous to walk unguardedly in the forests, lest one fall victim to the de-

[3] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 54–56; Müller, *Vor Oldtid*, 656; Schönfeld, *Der isländische Bauernhof*, 271.

[4] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 65.

vices laid for the capture of wild prey; but the likelihood of injury was reduced to some extent by the fact that in many places those laying traps or snares in a careless manner were held responsible by the law for damages done. Other laws determined the ownership of dead game. In some sections, the animals belonged to the persons killing or capturing them, regardless of who owned the soil; in others, persons were entitled only to game taken upon their own land, or upon the territory of another, if the pursuit of it was started upon one's own land and continued upon the property of another with the latter's permission.

Hunting in the community forests was free to the whole population, except for the restrictions imposed by the legislation for the protection of the game, which seem to have been in force pretty well throughout the North, though the most numerous instances are found in the Swedish law codes. In most of the provinces of this land the squirrel and hare, both of which were useful for flesh and fur, had several months of grace each year. These generally came in the spring and summer, though the time varied somewhat in different parts. Punishment for the violation of the protective laws was as a rule in the form of fines, sometimes as high as three marks —or twenty-four ounces of silver.[5]

The laws of Sweden were, however, just as insistent that all make war upon the wolf, man's greatest enemy in eastern Scandinavia. Every Westgothlander possessed of forest land was required to maintain both wolf snares and wolf traps. Others must at least own a wolf net, which the law demanded be shown to public officers who passed through the province four times per year

[5] *Ibid.*, 66–67; *Guta-Lagh*, 84–85.

for the purpose of inspecting them. East Gotland had similar laws regarding the possession of wolf nets.[6]

Wild Animals as Pets

Animals caught in traps were generally killed upon being found; the skin, if of value, was saved, and the flesh, if edible, was preserved by being frozen, salted, or dried. When the hunter had a goodly supply of meat, furs, and skins on hand, he piled it upon a sledge or loaded it on the back of a pack horse and thus took it out to the settlements where he disposed of his load to private individuals or sold it at the markets generally held along the coasts. But sometimes the animals, if uninjured, were permitted to live in captivity, especially if they were young; and were kept as pets, or were sold for the same purpose. This seems to have been particularly the case with bears, for which there was a fad. Polar bears, for instance, were regarded as a worthy gift for nobles or kings, for they were not known in Europe until the settlement of Iceland, and, hence, were quite a curiosity.[7] But brown bears from the forests were also domesticated. The tame bears were known in Iceland as "house bears," and were so common there that the law took cognizance of them. Brown bears were not native to the island; but some were imported and became such a nuisance that their further importation was absolutely prohibited. Owners of white or forest bears already in the island, like the owners of dogs, were liable to punishment if

[6] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 65.

[7] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 128. The droll and charming ancient little story of *Auðun* tells how Auðun, the happy-go-lucky hero of the tale, brought a polar bear from Greenland, and after one or two disappointments in an effort to bestow it as a gift to his own advantage, finally found favor in the eyes of the king of Denmark by giving it to him, and was enriched to such a degree by the king that he was able to establish himself in Iceland as a man of importance.

their pets injured the persons or property of others.[8]

It seems likely also that the wild cat or marten cat, was often made a pet, for some of the passages in the ancient sources seem to apply to this animal, rather than to the small domestic cat. Indeed, there has been some question as to whether the common cat had been domesticated in the North as early as the Viking Age, though it was a household animal by the twelfth century, even in Iceland.[9]

Bird life was very abundant in Scandinavia. Among the land birds which were hunted were partridges, woodcocks, grouse, capercailzies, hawks, falcons, and eagles. Sea-fowl were particularly numerous, especially along the coasts of Norway and Iceland and the smaller islands to the south. This class of game included tern, swans, geese, and ducks, all of them were sought by the fowler, particularly the eider duck, which was found upon the island coasts and also along western Norway.

Fowling

Birds of the forest were taken by means of nets and snares, and bows and arrows, as were the water fowl, but the fowlers sometimes climbed up the rugged cliffs, or lowered themselves from their tops, to the nests, and seized the birds with their hands. And the feathered prey, particularly land birds, were also caught with the aid of hawks and falcons, which were occasionally used in hunting small quadrupeds, such as hares, as well. Hawking was, however, rather the sport of the rich than the serious work of the fowler, who could better and more quickly secure his prey by other means.

Birds which were fit for food were, if taken in large numbers, preserved by pickling like other meat, or

[8] Schönfeld, *Der isländische Bauernhof*, 278–286.

[9] "Köttr," in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary.

smoked or dried, after being salted. Then they were stored away for the fowler's own use or sold for local consumption. In Iceland, and the small islands to the south, probably more than in other parts of the Scandinavian North, birds were used for food, because larger game was not so plentiful here as upon the continent.

Representatives of the hawk family were especially valuable commercially, because of the demand for them in the countries to the south, where much was made of the sport of hawking. Norway, in particular, was famous for its hawks and falcons, large numbers of which were exported; but some of the birds for foreign trade also came from Sweden, Iceland, and Greenland. The Norwegian king had the monopoly of these birds within his dominions, and might hunt for them in all forests, regardless of private ownership. In some instances, owners of land were required to pay him tribute in hawks, and to offer for sale to him—over and above the tribute—any additional ones which he wished. But in most parts of Scandinavia the hunting of all birds was unrestricted, and in Iceland where considerable attention was paid to catching the sparrow hawk, the fowlers made large sums from the sale of these birds to Danish merchants.[10]

Importance of Hawks and Falcons

Many of the sea fowl were valuable for their eggs as well as for their flesh, feathers and down. People living along the coasts often had definitely limited "egg-fields," in the ownership and protection of which they were defended by the law. In Iceland, for example, it was illegal to fire within bowshot of the bird-nesting places owned by another.[11] The birds nesting in these egg-fields were not domesticated,

Eggs of Sea-Fowl

[10] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 64–65.
[11] *Ibid.*, 66–67.

but the person claiming the land did everything possible to make conditions favorable for the birds, in order to induce them to come, and to stay. In addition to the eggs gathered by private individuals who owned the fields on which they were laid, great quantities were taken from the nests claimed by no one, along the steep cliffs and upon the rocky bird islands off the coasts of the larger islands. Often these could be secured only by hard climbing, but at times women could easily gather them from boats rowed along the coasts to the shelvy places where the nests had been built.

In view of the importance attached to the possession of egg-fields, it is more than likely that the Northmen—especially those living on the islands—not only knew how to keep eggs for a long time by pickling after they were cooked, but that they also were familiar with methods of preserving them raw for winter use. In the eighteenth century the Icelanders packed away eggs, which had been found, by testing, to be fresh, in layers of certain kinds of ashes, and thus kept them for several months;[12] and it is probable that the same procedure was followed many centuries before this time.

Sea Mammals

Sea mammals also made a valuable contribution to the comfort and prosperity of the ancient Scandinavians. Common seals were numerous along the northern coasts, as were also dolphins and walruses. These animals were at times secured by being clubbed to death in the rookeries, or caught in nets in the creeks and inlets along the shore, but perhaps more often they were hunted in boats with the harpoon.[13] Whales, too, were hunted thus, but much

[12] Olassen and Povelsen, *Reise durch Island*, I, 258.

[13] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 267; Horrebow, *Natural History of Iceland*, 89.

more frequently the Northmen obtained them through sick or dead animals being washed ashore. These drift whales were the subject of specific legislation, which, however, varied in different countries. In Iceland the carcass went to the owner of the strand, unless it was a harpooned whale, in which case, the hunter received half;[14] but sometimes the owner divided up with the one who found the drift whale. In monarchies like Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, the kings came in for the lion's share of stranded whales, if they were large, as well as of all flotsam. But the finders and the owners of the strand also were given a small portion. Small whales and other small sea mammals, and also fish, were divided up between the finder and the man to whom belonged the strand upon which they were washed.[15]

Because of the profit to be gained from drift-whales, drift-wood, and flotsam, it often happened that persons whose homes were in the interior—especially in Iceland —owned rights to certain strands, while having no claim to the grass land beyond them.

The sea animals which have been considered seem not to have been much used for food, unless the need was great, as in Greenland, but all were most valuable for the oil which they yielded; seals were highly prized for their fur; the skins of the other animals were used for various purposes; the ivory of the walrus was in demand for making small, fine articles, like combs, dice, and chessmen; and in the western islands the bones of the whale came in handy for building purposes, as previously mentioned.

Fishing was the most important industry connected

[14] *Grágás*, IV, 122–129.

[15] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 59; *Guta-Lagh*, 87; *Valdemar den Andens Jydske Lov*, 276, 278; *Kong Erics Sjellandske Lov*, 308–314.

with wild animal life in the Viking Age. At that time, though the population was much smaller than now, most varieties of fish were probably more abundant, and they formed an exceedingly important article of foreign commerce, as well as a standard article of diet at home. Hence, the yearly catch was very considerable. Salmon, trout, herring, cod, mackerel, sturgeon, perch, and pike were the kinds commonly sought by the fishermen. Salmon and trout were found in most of the rivers, and formed the staple food of the poor along many parts of the coasts; herring were plentiful in most of the surrounding waters, and were very important commercially; cod were taken in large numbers around the western islands, but the center of the cod industry was the Lofoten Islands, off the northwest coast of Norway, on which was Vaagen, the great fishing market, visited annually not only by whole fleets of boats belonging to the population of northern Norway, but also by merchants and fishermen from much greater distances.[16]

Fishing

Thousands of people dwelling along the coasts made their whole livelihood by fishing, and in some parts they were thus occupied throughout the year. But the farmers living near the seashore generally fished only in the summer time, and then merely for their own use. People whose homes were in the interior also often possessed fishing stations or camps along the coasts, to which they came in the summer.

Sea-fishing at a certain distance from the strand was free to all, but in most countries river- and lake-fishing were perhaps governed by law. Persons owning the land

[16] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 68; Bugge, Alexander, "Die Nordeuropäischen Verkehrswege im frühen Mittelalter," in *Vierteljahrschrift für Social und Wirtschafts Geschichte*, vol. IV, pt. II, p. 230.

bordering upon these places had special fishing rights there.[17]

Boats having but one pair of oars were frequently employed for fresh-water fishing, and also along the coasts. For the former use, the vessels were often short and somewhat blunt, in order that they might the more easily be propelled upon winding streams. But the usual fishing-boat generally held two or three men. It was also propelled by oars; but large vessels fitted with sails were used for fishing upon a more extensive scale or at a greater distance from home.

The Fisherman's Equipment

The Scandinavian fishermen while upon the water were dressed in skin clothes, put on over their other garments. These clothes somewhat resembled those worn by the modern Eskimos while in their boats, and were made in two pieces, a jacket, and trousers with which were combined socks. The skins used were generally from goats, sheep, or seals, and were made completely water-proof, as well as soft and pliable, by being well smeared with fish oil.[18]

For gathering his harvest of the sea, the fisherman used a simple equipment, including nets and lines of yarn or rawhide; hooks of metal or bone; sinkers of the same materials, or of stone; spears and harpoons; and a broad, heavy knife with which to kill the fish after drawing it in. If the fishing was done by hook and line, bait in the form of worms or small fish was carried along; and also baskets in which to carry the catch home. The smaller fish were taken by hooks or nets, but large ones, like salmon and sturgeon, were generally speared.

Much of the fishing was done by individuals, working

[17] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 129, 203.
[18] Henderson, *Iceland*, I, 360.

for themselves, but the better-to-do farmers often employed men to fish for them, just as they employed huntsmen. Many fishermen of means also hired others to work on their boats with them; and still other groups of men fished in partnership, dividing the catch in proportion to the interests invested in the enterprise, the owner or owners of the boat receiving considerably more than those who contributed only labor.

The fish were cured by being pickled or salted, and then smoked or dried. Some,—cod, for example,—were spread upon flat rocks along the coast to dry in the sun, while others were dried in the shade, in open sheds, or "wind houses," near at hand. The preserving process being completed, the fish were stored away, for private consumption in the winter, or until the fishing season had ended, after which they were marketed.

The ancient fishermen of the North had an interesting method of counting their catch, in determining whether it paid them for their exertions. A paying catch, for instance, must yield one fish to pay for the boat, one for the hook, one for the line, and one for the angler himself. This quaint method of reckoning the count has been used in modern times by the fishermen in some parts of Northern Britain, where Scandinavian influence lingered; and the same idea is reflected in the stanza from an old Scottish ballad placed at the head of this chapter.

CHAPTER XII

TRANSPORTATION: INTERNAL TRAVEL; SHIPS AND NAUTICAL SCIENCE

He who trusts in his wallet is glad when the night sets in. Short are ship's berths. An autumn night is changeable. The weather often changes in five days, but oftener in a month.

Song of Saws.

THE Viking Age in Scandinavia was characterized by a great amount of activity, not only externally,—displayed by commercial journeys and warring expeditions to foreign lands,—but also within the borders of the different countries of the Scandinavian North. Here, all who were freemen moved absolutely without any of the various restrictions which hampered them in the later Middle Ages. Most of the traveling was done in the summer, and at this time many varieties of people were seen going to and fro. There were skalds and fortune-tellers; vagabonds—women as well as men;[1] laborers looking for work; law-makers and judges on their way to the thing; merchants and traders; people bound upon special business errands; and others of more leisure, journeying to visit relatives and friends. The unusual mobility of the population made the question of transportation facilities one of importance.

Unusual Amount of Travel in the Viking Age

Considerable attention was, consequently, paid to internal improvements along this line; and, in view of the earliness of the period, a goodly amount of progress was evident in response to the various needs. The un-

[1] *Njála*, 98, 99; *Origines Islandicae*, II, 53.

even surface of the ground in Iceland, and the extensive tracts of swamp discouraged road-building here on any large scale; therefore, the routes of travel were largely marked by bridle-paths, or trails. But upon the continent, where conditions were more favorable, the law in some instances required that wagon-roads of a certain width be constructed through every farm, and that they be so built as to be equally good in dry and in wet weather.[2]

Roads, Ferries, and Bridges

Travelers often crossed streams in winter by riding or driving over the thick ice covering their surfaces, and in summer, by fording them at special places known to be safe; but even in Iceland during heathen times many bridges and ferries were in existence. Throughout the North, these were usually owned and cared for by private individuals. At the ferries, passengers and goods were transported over the water in simple rowboats, by the owners of the boats, whose homes were placed near where the roadway met the margin of the water. For the services rendered, the ferryman charged a toll, or fee.

The word "bridge" (*brú*) among the ancient Northmen had two meanings, and included bridges in the present day sense, and also causeways. Perhaps it was most frequently employed in the latter sense, for during the period considered the areas of undrained land were much greater than at present, and in many cases the only way in which transportation across them could be made possible was by means of high, artificial roadways made of layers of stone and gravel, edged by large heavy stones held in place by long ones standing on end, or by a sup-

[2] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 44.

port of wood.[3] But bridges in the present meaning of the term were also built. These were of wood, though at times upon stone foundations, and some of them spanned deep, wide streams.[4] No charge appears to have been made for their use, but the law protected the owners against damage done to them.[5]

The coming of Christianity gave an impetus throughout the North to road-making and the building of causeways, bridges, and ferries; for wayfarers, like the sick and the poor, were regarded as fit objects for pity and

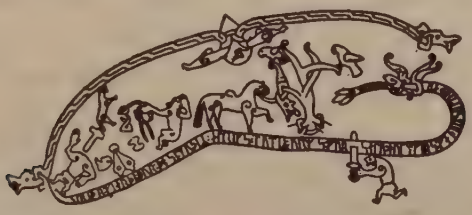


Fig. 24. Engraving from Rune Stone from a Memorial Bridge. (From Steenstrup's *Danmarks Historie.*)

assistance. Hence, pious men and women constructed free public aids to traveling for the good of their own souls, or for the benefit of the spirits of departed relatives or friends. These were known as "soul-roads," "soul-ferries," and "soul-bridges"; and in Sweden, at least, they were marked by monumental stones bearing explanatory inscriptions. The famous Sigurd Fafnesbane runestone (Fig. 24), which dates from the first half of the eleventh century, is such a memorial stone, and it was used to mark a *bona fide* bridge.[6]

[3] Lindqvist, Sune, "Ramsundsbron vid Sigurdsristningen och en Storbondesläkt fran Missionstiden," in *Fornvännen*, 1914, p. 203.

[4] *Ibid.*, 204–205.

[5] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 106.

[6] "Brú," in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary; Lindqvist. "Ramsundsbron vid Sigurdsristningen," in *Fornvännen*, 1914, 203–204. The inscrip-

Entertainment of Travelers

Since there were no towns in the Northland, where public places for the care of travelers could always be found, and since there were no roadside inns, the entertainment of the wayfarer was also almost exclusively a private matter. Most persons who traveled in the more settled parts of the land, found a welcome at private houses, for the conditions of the time made hospitality one of the cardinal virtues. In Sweden there was no greater shame than to refuse shelter to a wayfarer,[7] and in Iceland the well-to-do felt such pride in the fact that they kept open house that some made an enterprise of hospitality. One instance of this altruistic zeal is a woman who built a house across the roadway and served refreshments to all who came.[8] The guest-houses which at times formed a part of the homestead group have already been mentioned in another connection. They were intended definitely to take the place of public inns, and were for the temporary entertainment of travelers who were strangers to their host—especially those beneath him in social rank.[9] Strangers who were persons of prominence, and all friends, even though uninvited, were entertained in the parts of the dwelling occupied by the members of the family. Frequently strangers spent the whole winter at a private house; but this was only by special invitation, or as a result of definite understanding; otherwise, it was regarded as impolite to stay more than three days;[10] and persons possessing

tion upon the Sigurd runestone is as follows: "Sirid, Alrik's mother and Orm's daughter, erected this bridge for Holmger's, Sigröd's father's and her husband's, soul."

[7] Adam of Bremen, 191.

[8] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 57, 70.

[9] *Ibid.*, II, 53.

[10] Keyser, *Private Life*, 128. The same attitude is taken in Scotland still—probably a survival of Scandinavian influence there.

proper pride were careful not to wear out their welcome by tarrying longer.

As a rule, no money was taken by the well-to-do for the entertainment of strangers; and rarely were food and shelter refused by even the poorest, whether compensation seemed forthcoming or not, for such a refusal might mean the death of the wayfarer from hunger or cold. To guard against such a tragedy as this, in some of the provinces of Sweden the laws required that the country people supply travelers who were in need of these things with food for themselves and fodder for their horses; and to prevent the exaction of extortionate compensation, the prices of such accommodations were fixed by law.[11] The laws of Iceland seem to have been equally strict, and until well down into the Middle Ages they required that the farmers provide shelter and entertainment for two special classes of travelers—legislators, on their way to the meeting of parliament, and bridal parties journeying to the home of the groom. In the case of the latter, every peasant must shelter at least six of the travelers, if the bride or groom was in the group. To refuse to do so made him liable to punishment by lesser outlawry.[12]

Public Shelters

Persons journeying in an unsettled part of the land, however, or where the distances between houses were great, had largely to shift for themselves; but as such travelers were generally familiar with the lay of the country, they were usually prepared to do this. If the weather was good, they camped out by the wayside, and cooked food which they brought along, or they subsisted upon wild food obtained from the forests and streams. Sometimes they spent

[11] *Swerikes Rikes Lagh-Böker*, 29–30.
[12] "Brúðferd" in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary.

the night under the open sky wrapped in their heavy cloaks or in blankets, or tucked away in leather sleeping bags; but many travelers carried tents of skin, wadmal, or linen with them, and pitched them wherever they stopped for rest.[13] Yet during cold or stormy weather such persons were likely to fare ill, and, in recognition of this fact, philanthropic persons early erected public shelter houses in out-of-the-way places. This seems to have been done especially in Norway and Iceland, where the population was more sparse than in Denmark and Sweden. And later such shelters were built in Norway at public expense, by order of the king, and stood within at least a day's journey of one another. These structures appear to have been simply huts giving protection from the weather, and supplied with dry wood for fuel and straw for beds. They were open to all comers, but in the event of a shortage of room, any person who had been sheltered in such a wayside haven for three nights must depart. In some cases, the law required that lots be cast to decide who should go; and if the person whose duty it was to make way for a later-comer failed to do so, he had to pay a thief's fine to the king; and if the traveler entitled to his space in the inn died from exposure, the man whose selfishness caused his death was forced to pay full wergeld for the dead man.[14]

Methods of Travel

The Scandinavians traveled in various ways. Some went on foot, the simplest method, and virtually the only one left to the extremely poor. In the summer time, the pedestrian carried his provisions—if he possessed any—in a pack on his back, and helped himself along with a staff; in winter, when the ground was covered with snow, walking

[13] Schönfeld, *Der isländische Bauernhof*, 191.
[14] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 47.

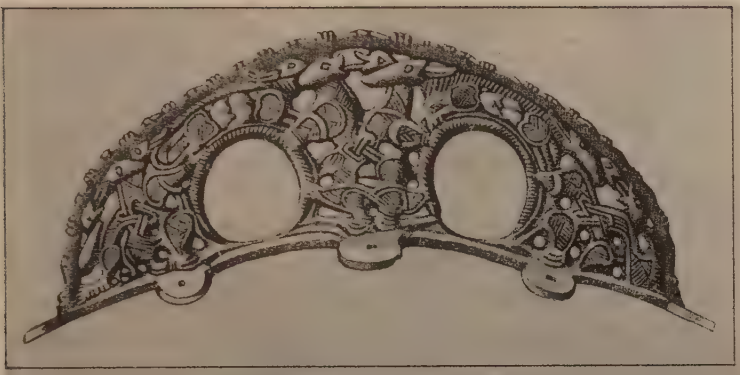


Fig. 25. Bronze Finishing for Harness

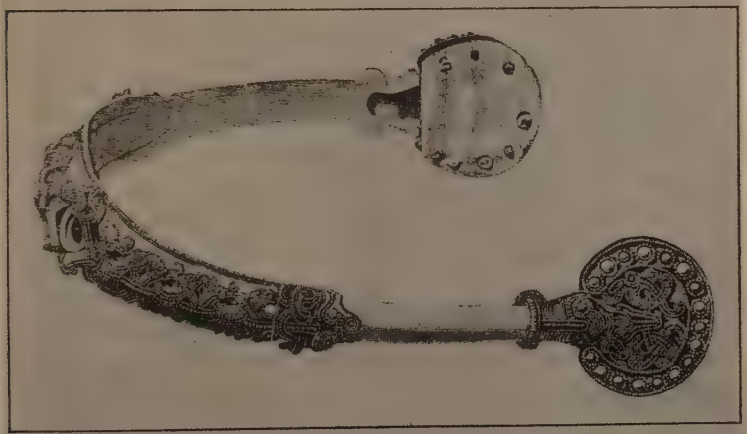


Fig. 26. Richly Decorated Spur of Gold. (From Gustafson's *Norges Oldtid*)

was easier, for the Northman shod himself with skees or snow-shoes, and could readily carry a supply of provisions or commodities upon a sledge or sled which he dragged behind him.

The most common method of travel for any considerable distance was by horseback riding, which was especially favored in Iceland, because of the poor roads. Upon every large farm in the Scandinavian North were several saddle-horses, the pride of their owners. White was the favorite color in horses, but black and sorrel horses were also much liked. A close comradeship existed between the horse and his owner, and if the latter was a person of some social importance, the taste and expense displayed in the equipment and decoration of the animal were intended to reflect the master's wealth and position.

Horseback Riding

While the poor man rode his horse bareback or with only a blanket of wadmal or a cushion of straw strapped to his back, and guided his steed by means of the most simple reins of rope or skin, the wealthy chieftain had a richly decorated saddle and bridle. The framework of the former appears to have been always of wood, which in the native saddles was carved and painted in bright colors, and often upholstered with embroidered cloth or with skins; but saddles of fine carved leather, and much superior to native work, were also imported from Spain and Portugal.[15] The saddles used by the women were quite different in style from those of the men, and were shaped like chairs, as is still true in Iceland. The mountings and stirrups of the best saddles were of metal and some were handsomely wrought; gilded bronze and silver were not unusual for these parts. Under the saddle

[15] Bugge, *Vesterlandenes Indflydelse*, 184.

were spread brightly-colored or gaily embroidered blankets. The spurs and parts of the bridle were frequently also of precious metal (Fig. 26), particularly of silver; and this was sometimes inlaid with gold and enamel and set with precious stones.[16]

The comfort and individual appearance of the saddle horses as well as their equipment and trappings received the attention of their masters. Their coats were rubbed smooth and glossy and their manes and forelocks and tails were kept trimmed. Blankets of skins or wadmal were thrown over them for protection against the cold, and their feet were shielded when traveling over rough ground by iron shoes, not nailed to the horse's hoof, as now, but made with parts projecting over the sides of the hoof by which the shoes were strapped to the foot.[17]

Pack Horses

People taking a journey of some distance or going upon a visit were usually accompanied by horses with pack saddles bearing chests of clothes and other supplies securely strapped, or tied, on. Merchants and traders also carried their goods upon pack horses led in a string, sometimes of a dozen or more.[18] The method of fastening the animals together was probably the same as that employed recently in Iceland, a rope being tied around the lower jaw of each horse and attached to the tail of the preceding one.[19] By this means one man alone could manage a very long pack train.

The Northmen also traveled in sledges, sleds, and wagons, even in Iceland. The sledges in the Far North,

[16] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 94; Schönfeld, *Das Pferd*, 42; *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, I, 45; Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 310.

[17] Schönfeld, *Das Pferd*, 41; Schönfeld, *Der isländische Bauernhof*, 136.

[18] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 147.

[19] Henderson, *Iceland*, I, 25.

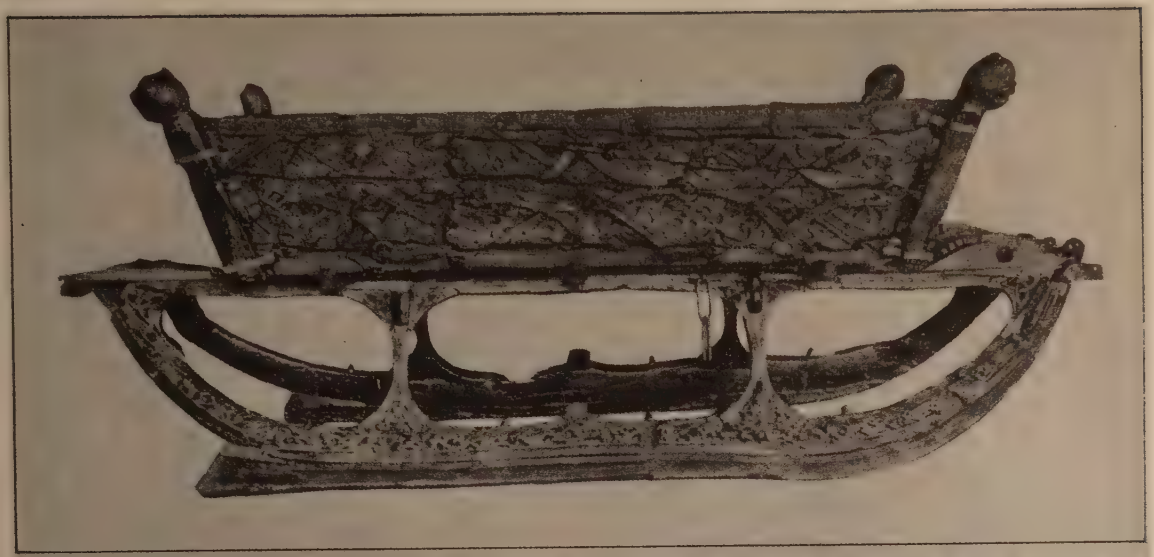


Fig. 27. Elaborately Carved Sledge. (From prospectus of book on the Oseberg discoveries, to be published by the Norwegian government)

especially on the borders of regions occupied chiefly by Lapps and Finns, were made partially of rawhide, drawn over wooden frames and fitted with runners of hard timber—in imitation of the vehicles used by the more primitive part of the population. But vehicles of native construction as a whole were made almost entirely of wood; often richly carved. A number of sledges have been found in ancient tombs (Fig. 27). All of these are small affairs of rather simple and clumsy lines, but carved in elaborate patterns. The wheeled vehicles were also of rather primitive style. Two or four wheels, made with a few heavy spokes, and with thick wooden rims, seldom, or never, protected by metal tires, were used upon the vehicles. The Northmen employed poles rather than shafts for drawing them, but at times a single animal drew the lighter carts or wagons (Fig. 28).

Vehicles

The wheeled vehicles were evidently built after models seen in the Roman Empire or other lands to the south; and some of these foreign wagons, which were quite superior to the ones of Scandinavian manufacture, were also taken into the North and used there.

Reindeer, as a rule, drew the sledges of the Far North, while the other vehicles were drawn by oxen or horses, perhaps most commonly the latter. For the heavier draft animals the harness was of very simple construction made from ropes of hair or hemp or strings of rawhide; but for the more showy horse-drawn vehicles, the harness displayed considerable artistic skill. For this, leather was used instead of cheaper materials, and also considerable metal, which, as in the equipment of the saddle horses, was sometimes silver or gold, or baser metals silver-plated or gilded,

Harness

frequently wrought into handsome designs (Fig. 28).[20]

Scandinavian Skill in Ship-Building

The fact that most of the Scandinavian settlements were upon small islands, or bordered rivers or lakes, or the coasts of the larger land areas, made the waterways the most usual as well as the best and cheapest highways. And as a consequence of the prevalence of water travel, the Northmen paid much attention to the construction of water craft, and gained a skill in this line scarcely equalled by any other contemporary European peoples.[21] Ship-building was an honorable calling which gave employment to many. The master ship-smith, in particular, was a person of importance. In the construction of a large ocean vessel many men worked under his supervision, each one doing a special type of labor.[22]

There were vessels of various styles, according to the use to which they were to be put. The row-boats used upon the internal water-ways have been considered briefly in connection with the subject of fishing; and their nature will be made clearer in connection with the following description of ocean-going vessels. The latter, as being more complex, require more detailed treatment.

General Character of Ocean-going Vessels

Scandinavian ships differed from those of other contemporary lands chiefly in that they were narrower and were pointed at both ends; also, bow and stern rose much higher above the water than did the vessel amidships. Though varying considerably with reference to size, all sea-going craft, whether intended primarily for

[20] Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 194; Gudmundsson and Kålund, "Skandinavische Verhältnisse," in Paul, *Grundriss*, III, 450.

[21] Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 182; Bugge, *Vesterlandenes Indflydelse*, 199.

[22] *Saga Library*, III, 322, 343.

Fig. 28. Elaborately Carved Wagon. (From prospectus of book on the Oseberg discoveries, to be published by the Norwegian government)

commerce or for war, were of much the same shape, even in the eleventh century.[23] In fact, it was not until after the opening of the Viking Age that the war vessel, as a special type, was developed at all;[24] and even after it appeared, vessels of commerce and of war were frequently used interchangeably, as merchants took to piracy and warriors temporarily forsook martial enterprise for peaceful trade.

Characteristics of Merchant- and War-Vessels

Trading craft were higher than those built chiefly for fighting; and they were likewise heavier and broader, in order to give greater capacity for cargoes, for which reason they were also without decks amidships. Built as they were for strictly practical use, less attention was given to their decoration. They differed from the war ships also in that they were largely propelled by sails, while the war vessels, though supplied with sails, were generally driven through the water by the use of oars. This last-mentioned distinction appears to have been also due to adjustment of the merchant vessel to better practical service; for oars seem to have been placed only near the prow and near the stern, while there were none amidships where room was desired for the cargo.[25]

Ship Construction

Oak was the wood most frequently used for ship construction, and the "clinch" method was employed in placing the boards together; that is, the slender, elastic strips of timber which were curved over the framework to form the body of the vessel were so arranged as slightly to overlap from the gunwale down. The edges were fastened

[23] Gudmundsson, Valtýr, *Nordboernes Skibe i Vikinge- og Sagatiden*, 7.
[24] Bugge, *Norges Historie*, vol. I, pt. II, 222.
[25] Gudmundsson, *Nordboernes Skibe*, 7–9.

with rivets or bolts of bronze or iron; and the seams were calked with pitch, sometimes mixed with cows' hair or sheeps' wool.

The Decks

Trading vessels were fitted with half decks in the stern and bow, and in the largest merchant ships there was a narrow deck or passageway on each side which united the two. The remainder of the ship was simply an open hold with floor boards laid upon the foundation timbers. Consequently, the cargo had to be covered with sail cloth or skins to keep out spray and rain.[26] War vessels, on the other hand, had a deck over the whole length of the interior below the gunwale, and two platform-like ones above this, at either end of the ship. The short deck in the stern was called *löftingen* and that in the bow, *forstavnsdaek*.[27] The main deck in the war craft was, however, so low amidships that it afforded no shelter. Therefore, a tent roofing was at times spread over this part of the vessel, for protection against the weather, the edges of the covering material being permitted to hang over the railing, to which they were fastened by means of small wooden pegs thrust in holes made for the purpose.[28]

Oars

One tier of oars on each side was the rule in Scandinavian vessels, but biremes were not entirely unknown. When there were two rows of oars, the war ship stood higher above the water.[29] The oars were long, and in the case of the large war vessels, in particular, were thrust through holes along the gunwale when in operation. These oar-openings were fitted with little sliding shutters which covered them when the

[26] Falk, Hjalmar, "Altnordisches Seewesen," in *Kulturhistorisches Zeitschrift*, IV, 48.

[27] Gudmundsson, *Nordboernes Skibe*, 15.

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] *Ibid.*, 21.

oars were not being used. Smaller craft often had simple oar-locks, or rests, of rawhide, hardwood, or iron. In small vessels the rowers sat upon benches made merely of planks which extended completely from one side to another; but in the large sea-going craft there were individual benches, evidently of the nature of chests or lockers, in some instances, in which the seamen kept their belongings.[30]

Size of Vessels

In Scandinavia the words "boat" and "ship" were used rather loosely and gave little indication of the maximum or minimum size of the vessel to which they were applied. In Iceland, for example, a vessel having but eight oars was called a "ship" (*skip*), but in other parts the smallest "ships" were somewhat larger. Mention of the number of oars or pairs of oars possessed by a vessel was a much more definite way of indicating size, and was the one generally used, unless actual dimensions were given. The smallest seacraft, outside of Iceland, described by their number of oars in the ancient records were twenty-six oared, while the largest ancient ship of which there is mention had one hundred and twenty oars, or sixty pairs; but the last size referred to was perhaps quite unusual, for the example in question was the "long ship" of King Canute the Great.[31] The average-sized ocean-going ships seem to have possessed from twenty to thirty pairs of oars.[32] A vessel having twenty pairs was probably about ninety feet long; one of thirty pairs, one hundred and sixty feet.[33] The viking ship from Gokstad, Nor-

[30] *Ibid.*, 19; Falk, "Altnordisches Seewesen," in *Kulturhistorisches Zeitschrift*, IV, 71–73.

[31] Gudmundsson, *Nordboernes Skibe*, 10.

[32] Falk, "Altnordisches Seewesen," in *Kulturhistorisches Zeitschrift*, IV, 98.

[33] *Ibid.*, 100.

way, which was discovered towards the close of the last century, was built for fifteen pairs of oars and was about sixty-six feet long. The width was a little more than one fourth as great as the length; and these proportions were perhaps representative of the average war vessel. The "long ships" or "dragon ships" of the latter part of the viking period were probably even more narrow as compared with their breadth.

Mast and Sail

The Scandinavian ship—in the more distinctive sense of the word—was really a large row boat to which a mast had been added. The mast was generally made from the trunk of a fir or pine tree, and, in the case of the larger vessels, its foot was sunk in a wooden socket fastened to the foundation tim-

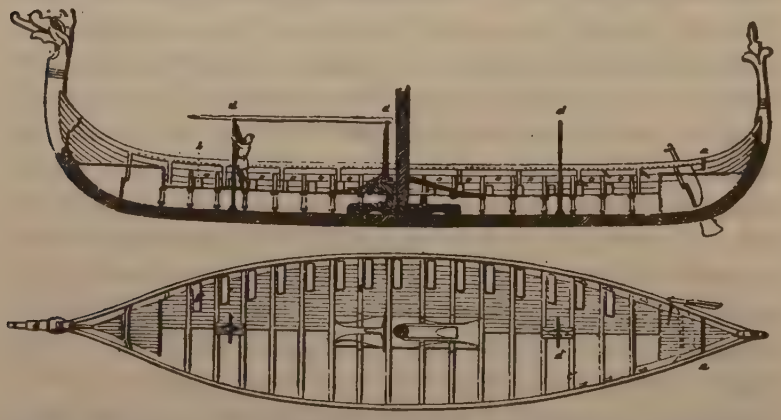


Fig. 29. Plans of a Viking Ship. (From Gudmundsson's *Nordboernes Skibe.*)

a. Breast-beam.
b. Rower's bench.
c. Cross beam forming frame work of vessel.
ddd. Supports for tent covering.

bers in the middle of the ship. This receptacle, which, because its ends were shaped like the tail of a fish, was called the "mast-fish,"—was so constructed that the mast

could be lowered without first being raised out of the hole which received the foot (Fig. 29).[34] The mast supported a single, square sail of linen or woolen cloth, held in place by means of ropes, usually made of skins, particularly walrus hide.[35]

In some of the war vessels there was at the head of the mast a top-castle of small size in which two warriors stood in time of battle, to secure a different vantage point from which to attack the enemy, as well as for lookout purposes.[36]

Anchor

The earliest type of anchor was merely a large stone, grooved or perforated in such a manner that a rope might be tied to it. Such weights were commonly used in the early Middle Ages for holding small boats. Another primitive form of anchor was composed of a frame, generally of wood, containing several stones; but the two-armed iron anchor of conventional type was copied from the Romans before historic times and was in common use in Scandinavia for large vessels in the Viking Age.[37]

All of the larger vessels carried a windlass which was employed for weighing the anchor and hoisting the sail, and probably also for raising the mast.[38]

Rudder

The rudder resembled a short, broad oar, supplied with a handle or pin at the upper end, by which it was moved, and was fastened to the right side of the stern, whence this side is still called the "starboard," or "steerboard."[39]

What their riding horses were to the Northmen on

[34] *Ibid.*, 55–61.
[35] Gudmundsson, *Nordboernes Skibe*, 23.
[36] *Ibid.*
[37] Falk, "Altnordisches Seewesen," in *Kulturhistorisches Zeitschrift*, IV, 78–81.
[38] *Ibid.*, 81–82.
[39] *Ibid.*, 73–78.

Ornamentation of Ships

land, their ships were to them on the water—particularly if war ships. They loved their "steeds of the billows," as the sea-craft were called by their poets,[40] and took as much interest and pride in their decoration as they did in the equipment and trappings of their riding horses. Carved wooden figures, shaped like the heads of men or of animals, placed on the ends of the vessel and removable at will, were a favorite form of adornment. The ancient records tell, for instance, of a ship called the *Carl's Head,* on the bow of which was a carved representation of the Scandinavian king Carl;[41] on the forepart of another vessel was displayed the figure of a steer's head;[42] while decorating a ship called the *Vulture* was a model of the bird of that name.[43] But the favorite animal of the Scandinavian mariner in the embellishment of his ship was the dragon, which played such an important rôle in the hero tales and the myths of the North. Sometimes a dragon's head appeared at both ends of the vessel, but more frequently, perhaps, when a head decorated the prow, a twisted dragon's tail finished off the stern. This favorite design was so generally used upon the "long ships," or larger vessels of war, which appear to have come into use in the tenth century, as to cause them to be called habitually "dragons," regardless of the model of their figure heads.[44] These decorative pieces were usually given as fierce an expression as possible by the carver, and were painted in colors, sometimes touched up with gilt; or the whole was richly gilded.[45]

[40] *Corpus Poeticum Boreale,* I, 167.
[41] *Saga Library,* IV, 55.
[42] *Origines Islandicae,* I, 219.
[43] *Njála,* 180.
[44] Gudmundsson, *Nordboernes Skibe,* 9.
[45] Falk, "Altnordisches Seewesen," in *Kulturhistorisches Zeitschrift,* 39–42.

In many other ways the sea-craft were adorned. At times, elaborate borders were carved along the gunwales, as is shown by the vessel found at Oseberg, near Christiania, in 1903 (Fig. 30). The sides of the ship appearing above the water's edge were generally kept black by coatings of tar, but were occasionally painted, in solid colors, or in stripes. For display purposes, as when a viking fleet was entering an enemy harbor, the vessel was decorated amidships by placing the brightly painted shields of the warriors in an overlapping row on either side, where they stood out in gay contrast to the black backgrounds. Perhaps the most decorative feature on a handsome vessel was the sail, which was sometimes of linen, but was usually of heavy wool, and was always gaily colored. Occasionally solid colors were displayed, particularly blue, red, or green, but more often the canvas showed broad stripes of bright contrasting shades; and on the sails of rich chieftains and kings there were at times facings of silk, or elaborate borders embroidered in silk and wool.[46] There often flew from the mast head when the ship was in motion the war chieftain's pennant or banner, which, like the sail, was bright of color; upon it was embroidered or painted the owner's personal emblem, frequently the figure of a raven or of some other animal.[47]

These Scandinavian ships, with their carved and gilded figure heads flashing and glittering in the sun, their richly colored outspread sails suggestive of the wings of the dragon, and the overlapping shields in resemblance of the scaly sides of the mythical monster, presented a splendid as well as terrifying spectacle when they ap-

[46] Worsaae, *De Danskes Kultur i Vikingetiden*, 18.

[47] Falk, "Altnordisches Seewesen," in *Kulturhistorisches Zeitschrift*, IV, 55–61.

peared in large numbers within an enemy harbor (Fig. 31).

The Ship's Crew

The regular crew of a merchant ship consisted of the captain, the steersman, or mate, and common sailors, the number of the latter usually varying with the number of oars used upon a given vessel. Some of the smaller merchantmen probably had no more than ten or twelve men. Before the eleventh century there was no special ship's cook, and each of the seamen—at least those below the officers—served as cook in regular order; or they decided their turns by lot.[48]

Cooking and Food of Seamen

But unless the ship could land, no cooking was done, for it was impossible to build in the vessels the open fires of the period for the purpose of preparing hot food for the crew. When practicable, the steersman kept close to the coast, in order that landings might be made for this purpose, and also for obtaining fresh water. The seamen had two meals each day, very simple fare, even when it was possible to land and cook. Porridge, cooked in a large kettle carried along for the purpose, was, as a rule, the only hot dish. Besides the coarse meal used in the porridge, the common provisions found on a ship were butter, cheese, dried fish—generally cod—and, at times, bread. Ale was occasionally carried along, but the customary beverage of the mariner while on duty was water, the cask for which stood beside the mast.[49] Sometimes instead of landing to renew the supply of fresh water—or when it was impossible to go ashore,—the cask was replenished by catching rain in the awnings or tent cloths of the vessel.[50]

[48] Gudmundsson, *Nordboernes Skibe*, 25–26.

[49] *Ibid.*, 26; Falk, "Altnordisches Seewesen," in *Kulturhistorisches Zeitschrift*, IV, 7.

[50] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 21.

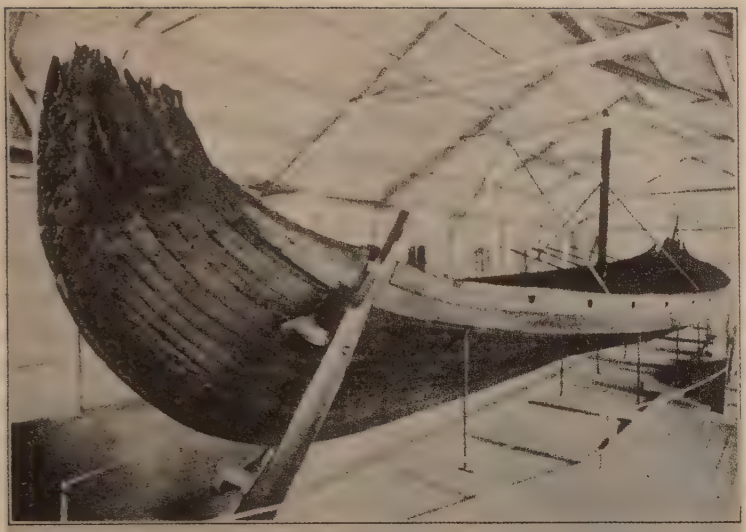


Fig. 30. The Oseberg Ship. (From photograph by Vaering, Christiania)

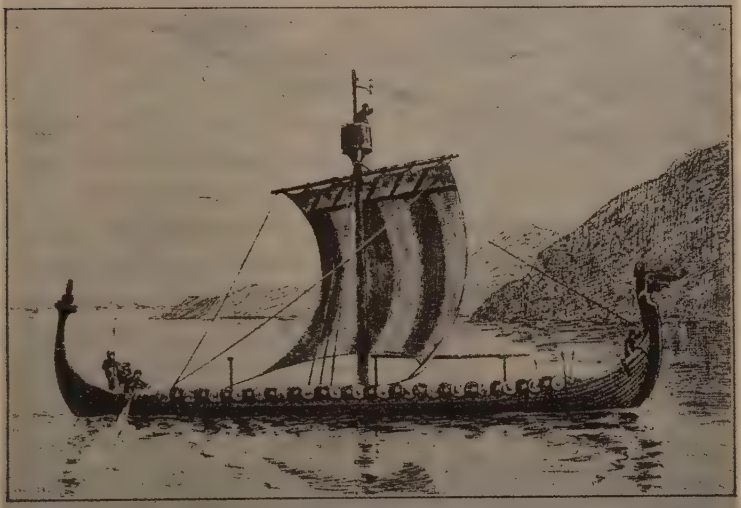


Fig. 31. Drawing of a Dragon Ship. From Gudmundsson's *Nordboernes Skibe*)

Frequently the shipmen spent the night on shore in tents pitched for the occasion; but, if it was impossible to land, they slept under tents stretched over the vessel as it rested in some sheltered place. The tents used aboard ship or on shore were often of black material, and were in shape very much like present-day structures of the same sort. But the ridge pole from which they were suspended was supported at the ends by decorated boards, resembling the vindskeidar found on the gable ends of contemporary Scandinavian houses (Fig. 32).[51]

Sleeping Arrangements of the Seamen

Fig. 32. Vindskeidar from a Ship's Tent. (From Visted's *Gamle Bonde-Kultur.*)

Though sleeping hammocks were not unknown, bags made of skins as a rule took the place of beds. Each seaman must come supplied with such a sleeping bag,—as well as with a chest in which to keep his sea-clothes, which were also usually of skin, well oiled. The regular sleeping quarters were under the decks, but goods were often stored here upon merchant vessels when space for the cargo was limited; consequently the men appear to have at times spent the night on the rowers' benches in their sleeping bags.[52]

There were, obviously, no special passenger ships in the Northland of the olden time. Hence, people who did not possess vessels of their own, but wished to journey from one place to another took passage, when opportunity

Accommodation of Passengers on Ships

[51] Falk, "Altnordisches Seewesen," in *Kulturhistorisches Zeitschrift*, IV, 10–12.

[52] *Ibid.*, 9–12.

offered, on war- or merchant-ships—usually the latter. Women were always given quarters below decks, but they probably never traveled by ship unless in the company of a man. Passengers as a rule furnished their own bedding, and their own food, which they cooked themselves.[53] Travelers generally paid directly for their accommodations upon the ship by means of goods or money, but occasionally men who were able to pay performed service as sailors in return for their passage, if they were anxious to reach a destination at a given time. And, in some cases, in order to secure passage aboard a crowded merchantman, they would hire themselves out as regular sailors with the intention of deserting the ship when it reached the desired port. But in order to prevent captains from embarrassment and loss from such happenings, and also from desertion by *bona fide* seamen, the laws of some countries, as Norway, provided for the punishment of sailors who deserted the captain before their term of service had expired.[54]

Harbors and Landings

Since the vessels of the Northmen were, after all, small and frail as compared with those of the present, the matter of making harbor was of great importance. Consequently, marks for indicating harbors were early in use throughout the North; and their erection was required in some of the countries of continental Scandinavia by order of the kings. The first harbor marks were sometimes a stone pillar or cairn, sometimes a pillar of wood, plain, or carved in the figure of a man, but after the introduction of Christianity, the customary beacon was a wooden cross.

If the landing place was an inferior one, the vessel

[53] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 120.
[54] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 98.

was anchored out in the water and those aboard disembarked by means of small boats, one or two of which were carried in every sea-going vessel; but if the haven was good, they landed directly with the aid of one or two movable bridges or piers which formed part of the ship's equipment. The pier, known as a *bryggja,* was of small size and resembled rather closely a gang-plank, or a rude ladder or stairway.

As a rule, no wharves in the present sense existed and there were no harbor pillars standing out in the water to which vessels might be tied; but upon the shore, close to the water's edge, were generally posts to which vessels might be made fast with a cable, if it was possible to approach close to the strand.[55]

Launching and Landing Vessels

Generally speaking, the sailing season lasted for a half year,—from the beginning of April to the beginning of October. In the autumn when the annual period for voyaging was ended, the vessel was stripped of its fittings, taken ashore on rollers, tarred, and stored for the winter in a shed built for the purpose near the harbor.[56] When a vessel was to be taken ashore or to be launched, the ship's captain had the right to demand aid of the persons dwelling near. He called for assistance by blowing a horn, and those who failed to respond were subject to punishment.[57]

Though, for the sake of comfort and convenience, the Northmen generally followed the coasts quite closely in their voyages about Europe, they were by no means afraid to sail boldly out to sea when an incentive to do

[55] Falk, "Altnordisches Seewesen," in *Kulturhistorisches Zeitschrift,* IV, 21–26.

[56] *Ibid.,* 19, 27–28; *King's Mirror,* 83–84.

[57] *Ibid.,* 28; Gudmundsson, *Nordboernes Skibe,* 27.

so offered. As is well known, they were the most daring as well as the ablest navigators of their time. Their fearlessness may be explained by their optimistic fatalism. If the Norns had already and arbitrarily decreed when the Northman should meet his bane, why be cautious? And their superiority as navigators came rather as a result of their greater experience and their daring than because of any special excellence in nautical science.

Skill of the Northmen as Navigators

Though they early understood how to sail on the wind, which other Europeans did not,[58] they were otherwise restricted to the primitive nautical devices of the time. If a vessel shipped the sea, the sailors were forced to bail out the water laboriously with buckets; for pumps were not introduced into the North until the early modern period. Also, since the compass was not known in Europe until the century of Columbus, the Scandinavian mariners had largely to sail by the sun and stars when far from land.[59] If the heavens became obscured and the vessel was driven out of its course by storms, they were obliged to flounder about in unknown seas until the weather cleared again, for they could place very little trust in the direction of the wind.—But it was while thus storm-driven that the Northmen discovered new lands.

Measurements of distance in traveling, whether by land or by sea, were somewhat indefinite throughout Scandinavia in those ancient days, and the distances

[58] Falk, "Altnordisches Seewesen,' in *Kulturhistorisches Zeitschrift*, IV, 19.

[59] The Icelandic *Landnámabók* states that before setting out for Iceland a Norwegian named Floki made a great sacrifice and "hallowed three ravens," which he let loose when out to sea. One of the three flew directly towards Iceland, thus guiding the voyager to the desired land. (*Origines Islandicae*, I, 17–18.) This was, however, certainly a very exceptional case, and there is no reason to conclude from it that any general use of this sort was made of birds.

given seem to have been the result of estimates or guesses, rather than of accurate measurements. There was also variation caused by the fact that the *time* necessary to cover the space between two points was taken into consideration. The *rast,* by way of example, was the time unit employed in measuring land travel, and this unit probably corresponded roughly to the modern Scandinavian mile, or about seven English and American miles; but the rast differed in length according to whether the country traversed was mountainous or level, like the Swiss *stunde* of the present time. The rasts in land where progress was slow were, however, sometimes distinguished as *short rasts,* but not always. The rast was less commonly used, though, than the day's journey, in giving an idea of distance; and this latter measure perhaps corresponded roughly to five Scandinavian or thirty-five English miles.[60]

Measurements of Distance in Land and Water Travel

The unit of measure in water travel was the *vika,* which is still commonly employed in Iceland. The ancient vika was perhaps somewhat longer than the land rast. But it was not the only measure of sea-travel, for very frequently distances were indicated in terms of days' sailings, one day's sailing being something like twenty-four or twenty-five Scandinavian land miles.[61] A day's rowing, which was less often mentioned, was, obviously, considerably shorter, and perhaps varied from six to nine Scandinavian miles.[62]

Days' sailings and days' rowings, used as measures of distance, were based upon average speed, for, naturally,

[60] Petersen, *Gammel-Nordiske Geografi,* 132–133.

[61] *Ibid.,* 135; Falk, "Altnordisches Seewesen," in *Kulturhistorisches Zeitschrift,* IV, 17–18; Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben,* 367.

[62] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben,* 367.

Speed in Sea-Travel

the progress made at sea varied greatly, because of dependence of the mariner upon the winds, and the general influence of the weather. With conditions unusually favorable, the distance between Trondhjem, in Norway, and Iceland could be covered in four days; and that between Denmark and England, in three. The time by sea from Scania, southern Sweden, to Birka and Sigtuna in the eastern part, with the best winds, was five days; while the journey between these points when made by land consumed a whole month.[63]

[63] *Ibid.*, 133–134.

CHAPTER XIII

TRADE AND COMMERCE

On returning to your lodgings examine your wares, lest they suffer damage after coming into your hands. If they are found to be injured and you are about to dispose of them, do not conceal the flaws from the purchaser: show him what the defects are and make such a bargain as you can; then you cannot be called a deceiver. Also put a good price on your wares, though not too high, and yet near what you see can be obtained; then you cannot be called a foister.

King's Mirror.

THE old Northmen were unusually shrewd and successful traders. In their interest in mercantile affairs and in the part which they played in the distribution of commodities, they excelled all other contemporary peoples of Europe. And wherever they went they stimulated those with whom they came into contact to greater attention to trade. Commercially, they were to their time what the Phoenicians were to the Eurasian lands of a thousand years earlier.

Commercial Rank of the Scandinavians

Within the units of the Scandinavian lands themselves the population to a considerable degree was occupied in a mercantile way. Traders and peddlers, very similar to those who still make their rounds in the more remote parts of the United States, went about from place to place carrying wares of various sorts. Women as well as men occasionally made a living in this manner.[1] Perhaps the merchants of this class usually traveled on horseback,

Domestic Trade

[1] *Njála*, 110.

carrying their wares in saddlebags, or upon pack-horses; but where the roads were good, some went about in wagons; while others followed the streams and sea-coasts in boats; and a few went on foot carrying their goods in packs upon their backs, or drawing them upon hand-sleds or sledges.

The character of the goods was determined by the needs of the district traversed and by the nature of the commodities obtainable at wholesale by the wandering tradesmen. Iceland is an example of this. The men of the interior, or those living along the more fertile parts of the coasts, supplied those of other sections with grain,—when they had a surplus,—with dairy products, wool, wadmal, and woolen articles; while the coast people sent söl, fish, eggs, and salt to the population living farther inland. Other commodities of local Icelandic trade mentioned in the ancient writings are smith's work and other hardware, and poultry, a dealer in which, Hen Thore, is remembered through having his name attached to one of the sagas.[2]

Trade Between Scandinavian Countries

Of more significance than the local trade which took place within the territorial units of Scandinavia was the commerce in home produce which was carried on briskly and peacefully between the different Scandinavian lands. The Goths of Sweden secured their herring, salt, and some of the other necessaries of life from Norway;[3] Iceland imported grain and timber, in particular, from the continent, and sent to the other Scandinavian countries raw wool, wadmal, coarse clothing, dried fish, and dairy produce; Denmark received sheep products from the Faroes; and she and southern Sweden drew

[2] *Njála*, 51–52; *Origines Islandicae*, II, 415.
[3] Petersen, *Gammel-Nordiske Geografi*, 111.

upon Lapland and Greenland for ivory, furs, and other Arctic supplies.[4]

The foreign trade was, however, of more importance still; and to it may be attributed to a considerable degree the remarkable prosperity which was enjoyed by the North, not only during the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries, but for a long time previous and for many hundreds of years afterwards.[5] To this foreign commerce were attached special honor and glory, and in it chieftains and kings took part.[6] Humbler persons, by the laws of King Canute, might be raised to the dignity of nobles if they could show that at their own expense they had made three voyages over the seas.[7] The stimulus to commercial ventures in foreign lands and the reputation resulting from having gone on long trading voyages was largely due to the high esteem in which the warrior was held; for the military aggressiveness which characterized the Viking Age and the piratical activity which gave the period its name were closely identified with the commercial development of the time. The merchant trading in foreign lands occasionally descended to piracy—for from time immemorial the foreigner was considered legitimate prey, and the viking corsair now and then abandoned plunder for peaceful trade. But the Scandinavian was not merchant and pirate at one and the same time; he alternated the two occupations, as will be made clear later.

Honor Connected with Foreign Trade

Through their mercantile and piratical activities, the Northmen were known to every people of Europe as

[4] Schönfeld, *Der isländische Bauernhof*, 118, 186–187.

[5] Worsaae, *Danskes Kultur*, 80.

[6] Falk, "Altnordisches Seewesen," in *Kulturhistorisches Zeitschrift*, IV, 4; *King's Mirror*, 80–81.

[7] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 115.

well as to those of Western Asia.[8] The expeditions to foreign lands generally took place twice a year—in the spring after the seed was sown, and in the autumn when the crops were all harvested.[9] If the destination was a near-by land, the party would often return home for the winter, if it started early in the season; but when the travelers ventured far afield—into the eastern Mediterranean, for instance—they might spend several years abroad, buying and selling, plundering and fighting. But three years was perhaps the average time spent away from home on a single voyage.[10]

All parts of Scandinavia contributed to the army of merchant adventurers; and perhaps of those whose errands were primarily mercantile, each unit of the land contributed about equally, in proportion to population. But, as a rule, the routes taken by those from different sections of the North were distinct. The British Isles and the western part of the mainland of the continent to the south came more directly under the influence of the Danes, Norwegians, and Icelanders; while the Swedes bent their activities more definitely towards the East, their destinations being the trade centers situated upon the internal waterways of the present Slavic lands, or the Eastern Empire—particularly its capital, called Micklegaard in the North. The traders always went well armed, and to a considerable extent they carried their food supplies with them. Those whose commercial interests were towards the Orient were sometimes forced to travel by land, and when this was necessary, they usually went in groups, for mutual protection. But whenever pos-

Trade Routes

[8] Steenstrup, *Normannerne*, I, 1.
[9] Keyser, *Private Life*, 105.
[10] Kålund, "Familielivet på Island," in *Aarböger*, 1870, p. 290.

sible they journeyed by water, where more rapid progress could be made, and where there was less danger from robbers.[11]

The routes leading to the East and South, where boats could be used much of the distance, were numerous. These followed quite closely the courses of the many long rivers rising in the central part of the continent. But at several points the merchants were forced to drag their vessels over land past rapids and waterfalls, or to dispose of them and to build, hire, or buy other boats, as the nature of the waterways changed.[12] A favorite route included the Gulf of Finland, the River Neva, Lake Ladoga, the River Volkhof, Lake Ilmen, the Dnieper, and the Black Sea. But many going farther east preferred the more direct route furnished by the rivers flowing into the Caspian Sea.[13] And sometimes a highway starting much farther to the west was chosen, especially by merchants from Western Scandinavia, in which case they took advantage of the long rivers of Germany, then continued by land to some Italian port, and went the remainder of the way through the Eastern Mediterranean. Still another course traveled to the East—taken by those who wished to trade with many lands—was by water all the way, and ran along the Atlantic coast of Europe and through the length of the Mediterranean.[14] Not uncommonly, one route was followed upon the outward journey and another on the return.

Routes to the East and South

The most important route opened up by the Norwe-

[11] Petersen, *Gammel-Nordiske Geografi*, 118–119.

[12] *Ibid.*, 118; Bugge, Alexander, "Seafaring and Shipping during the Viking Age," in *Saga-Book*, vol. VI, pt. I, 19.

[13] Peterson, *Gammel-Nordiske Geografi*, 119–123; Bugge, "Seafaring and Shipping," in *Saga-Book*, vol. VI, pt. I, 18.

[14] Petersen, *Gammel-Nordiske Geografi*, 75.

gians was that to the White Sea region, reached by sailing around the North Cape. Vessels plied back and forth between this fur-producing section of the Arctic Circle and Sleswig in southeastern Jutland, via Oresund. Other highways uniting this part of the continent ran from Sleswig along the shore of the present northern Germany to the Gulf of Finland; from Norway through Oresund to Bornholm, and on to Esthonia; from Denmark to the island of Gotland, and thence to the Gulf of Finland; and from Ribe in western Jutland along the shores of the present Holland, Belgium, and France, and across to England.

Northwestern Routes

Another route requiring bolder sailing, which was especially well known to Norwegians and Icelanders, led from the home ports to the Faroes and Orkneys, thence along the coast of Scotland to Man, Wales, and Ireland.[15] From the British Isles, and directly from Scandinavia itself, the Northmen also followed the west coast of Europe southward to Spain and Portugal, and then across to Northern Africa, where they conducted a flourishing trade with the Arabs.

Western Routes

Generally speaking, the Scandinavian North supplied the remainder of Europe, and to some extent the Orient, with all of the raw materials produced which she did not require for herself, and from these foreign parts she received in turn manufactured necessaries and luxuries. Great quantities of furs were sent south, especially from northern Norway and Sweden, Iceland, and Greenland. Most of the furs used in England in the year 1000 probably came from Scan-

Exports

[15] *Ibid.*, 115–116.

dinavia.[16] With the furs from the Far North came also the ivory and hides of walruses, and whale oil as well.[17] From farther south were sent the hides of sheep, cattle, and horses, raw wool, wadmal, and coarse woolen garments, the larger part of the wool and wool products being products of the western part of Scandinavia. Norway and Iceland, in particular, also exported a large surplus of fish, especially dried cod, but fish was an important commodity in the export trade of the whole of Scandinavia.[18] From continental Scandinavia went salt;[19] and the whole Northland exported butter and cheese. Amber from the Baltic shores was an important article of commerce, but not so important as it was some centuries before; and it played a lesser part than did the trade in furs.[20] Sweden exported large numbers of her famous horses,[21] and Norway and Iceland supplied the Southern lands with hawks and falcons.[22] Doubtless there was some foreign demand for feathers and down from the sea-birds of Norway and the western islands, but at this early time the products of the eider duck were by no means valued abroad as they have been in modern times, and eider-down was not then regarded in Iceland as an article of importance commercially.[23]

The Northmen were great slave traders. A goodly proportion of the human chattels in which they trafficked were bought or kidnapped abroad, or secured in foreign

[16] *Egils Saga*, 43–45, 51–54; *Fornmanna Sögur*, III, 135.
[17] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 110.
[18] Schönfeld, *Der isländische Bauernhof*, 118; Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 110.
[19] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 91.
[20] *Ibid.*, 99.
[21] Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 192.
[22] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 112.
[23] *Ibid.*, 102; Schönfeld, *Der isländische Bauernhof*, 118; *Cf.* "Dún" in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary.

lands as prisoners of war. Many of the slaves were, however, born in the North, and were probably made up largely of Lapps and Finns, though the Northmen appear to have occasionally sold their fellow Scandinavians into foreign bondage.[24]

Imports

From the south and east were imported manufactured goods and the raw materials which the Northland could not produce, or did not supply in sufficient quantities to satisfy home needs. From England came wheat, honey, and malt,—especially for use in Iceland and Norway,—and also linen; from France and the Rhine lands, wine, and from the former, finely woven, brightly colored fabrics.[25] Spain and Portugal also sent fine woolen goods, home-produced silk, and the high-grade leather saddles already mentioned, as well as various trinkets.[26] "Russian" hats were well-known articles of foreign headgear worn in Scandinavia, and were evidently purchased from the Slavs of eastern Europe.[27] Foreign slaves, already referred to in more than one connection, were perhaps largely obtained from the Celtic parts of the British Isles, particularly Ireland. Out of the remoter Orient were imported,—sometimes by the Northmen directly, but oftener through Eastern Europeans acting as middlemen,—many commodities, such as damasked swords, superior to anything that could be obtained in Europe, jewels, silks and embroideries, richly colored rugs and hangings, and numberless other articles of luxury.[28]

Very commonly merchants owned a share in the ships

[24] Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 92; Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 102.

[25] *Egils Saga*, 52, 59.

[26] Petersen, *Gammel-Nordiske Geografi*, 184.

[27] *Gudmundar Saga*, 117.

[28] Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 192.

in which they carried their goods; if not, they engaged space in other merchant vessels, for which they paid a definite price. Their interests were carefully guarded by laws which early came into existence. In Norway, for example, if a trader had reserved in advance space for his goods, and at the time of sailing the cargo proved too heavy, the captain must leave his own merchandise behind, in order to make room for others. Next after the captain the person who last engaged space must give it up, but the laws required that the captain compensate him.[29] In case of shipwreck, the law secured to each trader his wares, regardless of who owned the land upon which they might drift, if he could prove his ownership of them by means of witnesses.[30]

Regulations Regarding the Transportation of Merchandise

In most Northern harbors also merchants had special rights which developed from the desire to stimulate commerce; but trade, even for the native merchants, was not completely free, for persons owning the place of landing were permitted to lay toll upon merchant ships;[31] and traders from abroad were, in addition, required to pay special fees to the king for commercial rights within the land.[32]

Throughout the Middle Ages, as well as during the long stretch of centuries preceding, war was, as we know, the rule in Europe, and peace, the exception. Consequently, in order to make trading possible, a special merchants' truce was necessary. And so important was foreign trade to all European countries, and in such high regard was

The Merchants' Peace

[29] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 58.
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] *Flóamanna Saga*, 58.
[32] Schück, Henrik, *Birka*, 25.

commerce held, that such a peace was as a rule readily established by Scandinavian merchants when they approached a foreign market-place where they desired to trade. The signal given to indicate that the mission of the newcomers was commercial and not military was generally the hoisting of the "white shield of peace." This "white" shield was perhaps merely the painted wooden shield of the warrior reversed so that the unpainted light-colored wood was in view. If the merchant was on land and was alone, he signified his intentions by holding his shield in his hand high above his head; but a group of merchants usually raised a single shield aloft on a pole; if on board ship, the token was fastened to the mast near its head, so as to be plainly visible from the shore.[33] The special significance of this hoisting of the shield was that by thus exposing his person to the attacks of the enemy the trader showed his good faith. When held aloft as a token of truce, however, the shield was not always reversed; sometimes the brightly colored side was exposed to the enemy; but the fact of its being raised in such a manner as to leave the body unprotected was regarded as sufficient. Occasionally, also, peaceful intent was indicated by other tokens.

When the commercial transactions were completed, the shield of truce was lowered, or,—if fastened to the mast, —its bright side was turned outward, or some other sign was given that peace was at an end; and the recent buyers and sellers often transformed themselves into fiercely battling warriors.[34]

In some cases, the merchants' peace was of a more

[33] Lehmann, Karl, "Kauffriede und Friedensschild," in *Germanistische Abhandlungen zum LXX. Geburtstag Konrad von Maurers*, 54, 60.
[34] *Ibid.*, 60.

comprehensive, stable, and lasting nature,—though, at best, the period of its duration was very brief; for with the governments of some countries groups of Scandinavian merchants made a general truce or trading peace; in return for commercial privileges they agreed not to levy warfare against the inhabitants of the land as a whole.

Weights and Measures

The weights and measures employed in early medieval commerce varied at different times and in different Scandinavian countries. It is therefore impossible to tell in even a comparative manner what some of the terms used in dividing commodities signify. Most of them are, however, fairly clear. For determining weight two kinds of apparatus—both borrowed from the Romans—were in common use. These were the small, symmetrical, double-armed balance, used for weighing precious metals and small objects (Fig. 33), and the long-armed steelyard, for heavier and more bulky wares. The largest unit of weight appears to have been the *lest,* or ship's cargo, which evidently marked the capacity of the average ocean-vessel. It was made up of twelve "ship-pounds," but the equivalent of the ship-pound (*skip-pund*) in modern terminology is not known. Another large unit of weight, common in Iceland, was the *vaett,* or weight, which was equal to eighty marks, or about forty pounds, modern English measure. Twenty marks' weight made a *fjórðung.* The pound (*pund*), probably introduced from England, was also used to some slight extent, especially in the late Middle Ages.

In the ancient records one reads, however, much more of the weights used more especially for weighing money. These were very similar to the Roman, and were evi-

dently introduced into the North by traders who became familiar with them in the Eastern Empire. This Romano-Scandinavian system included the mark (*mörk*), *eyrir,* or ounce, the *örtog,* and the *penningr.* The mark was generally one half of the modern sixteen-ounce pound in weight, and was made up of eight ounces, or aurar; the eyrir generally included three öretogs, but the number of "pennies" in the öretog, varied greatly, thus causing confusion in the monetary system.[35] For instance, thirty pence were counted to an ounce in Norway at one time, while in Iceland, sixty at one time, and ten at another.

Measures of Capacity

Measures of capacity as well as measures of length were in common use, and the former were employed for liquids as well as for solids. The *sáld* was a large measure used for corn, ale, and other things, but its present day equivalent is not known. A graded system commonly employed in Norway for liquids included the *askr,* the *blótbolli,* and the *justa.* Four justur made one "bowl," as a rule, and two bowls, one askr. This system, or one very similar, was doubtless in use throughout Scandinavia.

Measures of Length

Measures of length were chiefly needed for the sale of cloth and clothing. The finger, foot, and arm were the original standards of measure in Scandinavia, as in most other places;[36] and it is probable that the "foot," which was as long as the average man's foot was used to some degree in the Viking Age, as was also a measure corresponding to the modern inch, the standard for which was the first joint of the thumb,—whence the word *tomme,* meaning

[35] Seebolm, *Tribal Custom in Anglo-Saxon Law,* 233; Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben,* 118–119.

[36] Bugge, *Vesterlandenes Indflydelse,* 306.

inch in modern Danish. But by far the most common measure of length known to commerce was the ell (*alin*), based upon the length of the forearm from the tip of the second finger to the elbow. The ell employed in Iceland before the thirteenth century was just eighteen inches long; and that used in other parts of the North was probably virtually the same; but in the year 1200 by a new Icelandic law was introduced the *stika,* or double ell, the exact length of the modern yard. And to prevent dishonesty and inaccuracy in measurement, a lawful stika, or yard, to be used as the standard, was marked upon the walls of the churches, especially the church at the meeting place of the general parliament or Althing.[37] It is very probable that earlier, in the heathen days, the standard ell was exhibited in the temples or at the political assemblies in a similar manner.

Most of the traffic carried on by the Northmen, especially that done on a small scale in the remoter parts, was of the nature of barter; but out and out buying and selling was quite usual, and even in the case of commerce carried on by exchange of commodities, the goods which changed hands were quite regularly spoken of in terms of currency. For in the Scandinavian lands there were several well-recognized forms of currency, or media of exchange, the most usual being cattle, textile wares, and precious metals. In Iceland, and to some extent in Norway and the other Northern lands, the cow passed as a unit of value, the law of Iceland requiring that the standard animal be one without blemish and between three and ten years old.[38] The laws of various Northern lands also fixed the value of

Currency

[37] "Alin," in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary; *Grágás,* IV, 191.
[38] *Grágás,* IV, 192.

other domestic animals and of many common commodities in terms of cow-value, or of money, making it easily possible for them to be used as currency.[39]

But the most general Northern product used in the Scandinavian lands as currency was wadmal, the plain, home-woven, woolen cloth; this was a standard of all value and payment in all parts of the North until metal coins came into use. Even at the present time, in some portions of Scandinavia the value of land is theoretically reckoned in terms of wadmal.[40] The recognition as currency of a material as easily produced as wadmal was a great boon to the poor, and made for independence and thrift, for there was, so to speak, a mint on virtually every farm; the currency was coined on the hand-loom. The unit of measure in wadmal was a piece one ell long and two wide.[41] Two qualities of cloth were commonly used, brown- or brown-striped and plain white, the former being more valuable than the latter.[42] Later, linen, imported as well as home-woven, measured, like wadmal, by the ell, came in as a medium of exchange.[43] Rugs, too, passed as currency to some extent, their value being fixed according to size and thickness of the nap.[44]

Precious Metals

Precious metals, however, seem to have formed the most common commercial medium in Scandinavia as a whole during the early Middle Ages. Silver played a more important part than gold, and most payments were probably made in it. As has already been indicated, the metals were carefully weighed out in balances. In general, the gold mark had

[39] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 51–53.
[40] Annandale, Nelson, *The Faroes and Iceland*, 136.
[41] Schönfeld, *Der isländische Bauernhof*, 223.
[42] *Ibid.*, 223–224.
[43] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 121.
[44] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 120, 395.

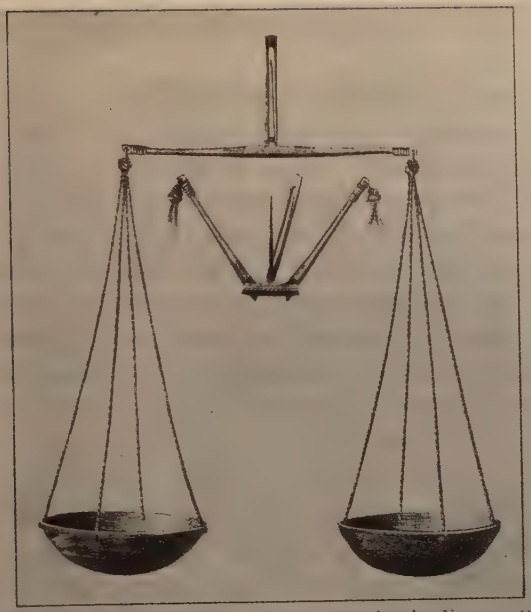


Fig. 33. Bronze Balances. (From Gustafson's *Norges Oldtid*)

Fig. 34. Weights for Balances, Silver Bars, and Pieces of Coin. (From Steenstrup's *Danmarks Historie*)

eight times the value of the same weight of silver. The silver in large amounts—and, to a lesser extent, the gold —was carried in the form of bars which had been cast in molds; and for the purpose of making smaller change, it was drawn out in the shape of spirals, or long, thick wires, from which small parts could be cut or broken and weighed (Fig. 34).[45] Gold and silver in jewelry, like those metals in bullion, were weighed and passed out as money, careful note being made of the degree of purity of the metals used.[46] Foreign coins of gold and silver, which were used in the North centuries before a native coinage came into existence, were likewise weighed. The original reason for this was that when first introduced their use was not clearly understood; hence, they were looked upon merely as bullion, as is made quite clear by the fact that in order to get exact weight the foreign coins were cut into pieces, just as were the unstamped metals regularly used in bulk.[47] By the close of the Viking Age, great quantities of the precious metals in the form of foreign coins—especially those bearing the stamps of English, French, German, Byzantine, and Arabian mints—were in circulation in Scandinavia.[48] But, because coin-clipping was common, the custom of reckoning by weight was continued long after the principle of coinage was entirely familiar.

The introduction into Scandinavia of a real native coinage was a gradual process. The first step in this direction was taken in the last part of the ninth century when King Halfdan the Black had coins struck in England, largely after British

Native Coinage

[45] *Ibid.*, 156; Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 119.
[46] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 117–118.
[47] *Ibid.*
[48] Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 192; Gustafson, *Norges Oldtid*, 126; Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 98.

models,[49] for use in Norway. Next, mints were erected in the North, but with English workmen in charge. This transition took place in Denmark first, about the year 1000, and in Sweden perhaps a quarter of a century later.[50] But the earliest coins struck in Scandinavia were almost exclusively modeled after foreign ones; as in the previous stage. English money was copied, but the "Carolus" coins minted in Dorestad, in Utrecht, in the time of Charles the Great were also favorite models.[51] Finally, a genuine native coinage was developed: the coins were made in the Scandinavian kingdoms, from models originating with native artists, and generally bore the name of the king in whose reign they were struck.

Each of the Scandinavian coins contained as a rule a definite amount of metal, corresponding to the weights used for gold and silver, and they were generally known by the name of their weight, as mark, penny, and so on. But they did not pass entirely upon their assumed face value, for, because of the coin-clipping already mentioned as well as of other abuses, this was not always safe; hence, the scales were continued in use for the purpose of verifying the value of the coins; as well as for weighing the bullion which also continued to pass as money.

In the early days before a domestic coinage came into use, as well as after its establishment, dishonesty of various sorts, besides the paring away of a part of the coin, existed in connection with the currency. The most common of these were counterfeiting of coins and passing as pure, metal in other shapes containing alloy. Consequently, the old laws which fix values carefully distinguish between pure

Counterfeiting

[49] Bugge, *Vesterlandenes Indflydelse*, 273.

[50] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 120; Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 189.

[51] Bugge, *Vesterlandenes Indflydelse*, 265.

metal "which could stand to go into fire,"[52] and that mixed with alloy; and when bargains were made, the sellers were also careful to make stipulations as to the purity of the metal which they were to receive in payment. The mixing of baser metals with gold and silver was not the only form of counterfeiting, and it was, seemingly, not even the most usual one; for the more common device of the swindler appears to have been to cover with thin coatings of precious metal coins made entirely of cheap metal. In the same way, bars and wires made largely of copper were at times passed off as being entirely of silver or gold.[53] Consequently, it was customary to test coins and bullion for purity by cutting into them.

Another form of cheating sometimes practiced was the filing away of part of the surface of the bronze or iron weights belonging to the balances in which the precious metals were weighed; but this was sometimes guarded against by coating the weights with a thin layer of another metal.[54]

Price-Fixing

The great diversity in character of the currency doubtless caused considerable confusion, but most of the Scandinavian countries, recognizing this, tried to prevent injustice in business transactions by interpreting the value of one commodity in terms of another, and currency in a like manner, and by giving a definite price in weights of gold and silver for the most common commodities. For instance, the Icelandic law fixed the value of six standard ells of white wadmal as one eyrir, silver, while five ells of the coarse, striped wadmal, which was more expensive, had the same

[52] *Grágás*, IV, 192.
[53] Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 192.
[54] *Ibid.*; Rygh, *Norske Oldsager*, 26.

value. Four hundred and twenty ells of plain wadmal were worth "one hundred in silver." The hundred meant was the long hundred, or one hundred and twenty aurar, or ounces, which was clearly understood; and the silver referred to was minted silver, which contained some alloy; hence, the larger proportional number of ounces than in the case of the price given for one yard.[55] But the fluctuation of prices is shown by the fact that in the year 1000 in Iceland the hundred in silver was valued at eight marks of pure silver, or sixty-four ounces of the same.[56] Linen was much more expensive than wadmal, a piece of the linen imported from England two ells long and of the same width being equal in value to two ounces of silver. In Icelandic law also the value of the cow was definitely fixed in terms of other currency.[57] The law, in addition, gave in considerable detail the value of the standard cow in terms of other animals.[58]

A specific illustration of the manner in which the price of common articles of trade was at times fixed is supplied by the statement in the old Icelandic law that six fox skins were equal in value to an ounce of silver, as were also six lamb skins with the wool on, six wether skins without the wool, and three skins of a year-old cat.[59]

Similarly, but with less detail than in Iceland, so far as the records show, the just price of commodities was fixed by law in the other parts of the North.[60]

Business transactions were occasionally conducted on credit in the ancient days; and during the heathen period and in the early Christian time,—until prohibited by the

[55] *Grágás*, IV, 191–192.
[56] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 121.
[57] *Ibid.*, 51–52.
[58] *Grágás*, IV, 192–194.
[59] *Ibid.*, 192.
[60] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 51–53.

pope,—interest was apparently paid upon such debts. It was quite customary also in this period to lend money at interest,[61] as well as to charge rent for the use of goods or property; but in Iceland the law prohibited charging any rent in excess of ten per cent. of the value of that which was rented.[62]

Business Practices

There was no system of written numbers regularly in use in the heathen period; consequently, merchants were not burdened with account books. The only record kept appears to have been the tally- or score-stick (*skorukefli*). Upon this a cut, or score, was made for every twenty units counted—whence the origin of the word "score," meaning twenty—and the stick was split lengthwise, in such a manner as to leave a record on the two parts, one of which was retained by each party to the transaction.

All important bargains were made in the presence of witnesses, and were solemnly sealed with the handshake (*handsal*)—still exchanged at the conclusion of bargains in Scandinavia—and as the breaker of faith was despised, the terms of the contract were not often violated. But if such a breach of trust took place, the injured party could secure justice through the law courts, if he had sufficient evidence of his rights.[63]

All fraud or deception in business transactions was also liable to punishment, whether such consisted of verbal misrepresentation or the passing off of worthless goods for those having value. The laws of Norway are an example of this. And in their effort to make clear what should be regarded as fraud they throw interesting

[61] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 20 ff; *Origines Islandicae*, II, 19–20.
[62] *Grágás*, IV, 138 ff.
[63] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 21, *passim*.

light upon the tricks of ancient trade—practices which sound strangely modern. "If one sells sand or shavings for meal or butter, that is fraud," says the quaint old law.[64] And for such dishonesty one might be required to pay a fine of three marks,[65] which was a heavy punishment, in view of the purchasing power of the amount.

[64] *Ibid.*, 24.
[65] *Ibid.*

CHAPTER XIV

MARKETS AND TOWNS

Whenever you are in a market town, or wherever you are, be polite and agreeable; then you will secure the friendship of all good men. . . . If you are unacquainted with the traffic of the town, observe carefully how those who are reputed the best and most prominent merchants conduct their business.

King's Mirror.

Though buying and selling took place whenever merchants arrived in a community with commodities which were in demand, the bulk of the Scandinavian trade was carried on at special markets or fairs which were held quite regularly in favorable locations. The largest of these special commercial gatherings usually came but once a year,—as a rule in the summer or autumn—and lasted for several weeks.

Markets and Fairs

The great markets were generally held along some highway, or at an important cross-road. Frequently, even in the eleventh century, by which time a few towns had risen in the land, they were often still found in the open country, far from the centers of settlement. The sites chosen were usually in the vicinity of noted temples, or of political assemblies; at the mouths of rivers, or on other harbors; in the neighborhood of good fishing grounds; or on the borders of the richest fur-producing regions.[1]

Whether held in town or country, the annual commercial assemblies were very similar in character. Here

[1] Bugge, "Handel," in Hoops, *Reallexikon.*

gathered people from all over Scandinavia, to buy and sell, and make other business arrangements, to take in the sights and amusements furnished as a rule at every large gathering, to meet old friends and make new ones. And here were also found people from many foreign lands, with strange manners and strange garb, on hand for the purpose of purchasing native products or of disposing of wares brought with them and largely unknown to the North.

Character of the Annual Fairs

Some of the more important visitors to the annual commercial gatherings perhaps had permanent buildings on the grounds, which they renovated and fitted up for occupancy every year, but as a rule the structures found at the markets and fairs were of a temporary nature, and were merely booths or tents of linen, coarse wool, or skins, subdivided by means of curtains. Within such shelters the people lived while the traffic lasted; and in the front part of them were exhibited in chests and bales and skins and baskets the wares which they had to offer.

At a short distance from the aggregation of dwellings belonging to the traffickers was the common pasture land, where the beasts of burden which had carried most of the merchandise to market were permitted to graze after being tethered or hobbled, or placed in the care of herders.

All who came to these Northern commercial centers enjoyed the special merchants' peace provided by law, without which little trafficking could take place. For the violation of the law unusually severe punishments were provided. In Denmark, any one wounding or murdering another in the market place must pay the regular fine, or wergeld, and forty marks in addition, for breaking the market

The Market Peace

peace; in Sweden and Norway any man striking a death-blow upon the market place in the forenoon when trade was most active was required to pay a double wergeld.[2]

Icelandic Markets

Iceland's foreign commerce was almost entirely indirect, and was carried on largely through the ports of northern Norway; consequently most of the merchants who appeared upon the island were Scandinavians. But there was no lack of buying and selling. Much of this took place on a small scale, however, at booths or tents erected upon the shore by merchants of single ships upon arriving in the harbor; or at markets held in connection with the local political assemblies or religious gatherings; but at the meeting of the Althing in the summer time much more extensive trafficking occurred. And there was at least one special market, sufficiently large to correspond to some extent to the great commercial gatherings in the older Scandinavian lands. The place for this market was called Gazar and was situated north of the present Akureyri.[3]

Norwegian Markets

In several parts of Norway were important markets, the oldest known being Skiringssal, situated in the vicinity of a great temple near the present Lärvik. There were several much-frequented markets farther north also, some in the Lapp country, where the traffic was largely in skins and furs, and others along the coasts, where the commodities dealt in were chiefly fish, and the skins and other

[2] Lehmann, "Kauffriede und Friedensschild," in *Germanistische Abhandlungen*, 49. The *Bjarkeyjarrettr*, or Birka laws of Sweden, were for the protection of the merchant while engaged in his peaceful calling. They seem to have had their origin in special regulations for the defense of some Northern market upon an unknown birch-forested island—whence the name, meaning "birch island." Later these laws were improved in various ways and extended to other market places. *Ibid.*, 53, 61, 62.

[3] Bugge, "Handel," in Hoops, *Reallexikon*.

products of sea-mammals. The greatest commercial center of the Far North was in the vicinity of the Lofotens, near Kabelvaag, and was called Vagastefna. During the fishing season this was thronged with merchants from far and near.[4]

Danish Markets

The largest markets of rural Denmark appear to have been situated upon the eastern and western coasts of Jutland, where the chief land highways crossed; but some were on the desirable harbors of the adjoining islands.

Swedish Markets

Here and there in continental Sweden, generally upon the lakes or rivers or harbors of the coast, large assemblages of merchants gathered and trafficked in the wares which they brought; the most important of these country markets was at Uppsala which was the site of a very famous heathen temple to which people gathered from all over Sweden for worship. But the island of Gotland off the Swedish coast attained to a greater commercial prosperity than any other part of Scandinavia during the Viking Age; and this trade was almost without exception carried on in country markets; for Wisby, the earliest municipal center of the island, scarcely came into any prominence until the twelfth century. This unusual mercantile activity was due to the fact that towards the close of the viking period the trade between East and West was carried largely across Gotland, though routes of lesser importance crossed the islands of Oland and Bornholm, farther to the south.[5] On various parts of Gotland were held large markets or fairs, where the commodities of the different parts of Europe changed hands. The great volume of the trade carried on at these places is indicated

[4] *Ibid.*, 424.

[5] *Ibid.*, 421; Worsaae, *Industrial Arts of Denmark*, 80.

by the fact that the total amount of ancient foreign coins found on the island up to a few years ago was sixty-seven thousand, exactly one half of the foreign mintage unearthed in the whole of Scandinavia.[6] And how far-extending into the Orient were the commercial interests of the Gotlanders is suggested by the fact that a vessel with ornamentation of Buddhistic design has been found in the island.[7]

As a result of their extensive contact through trade with the peoples of many lands, the population of Gotland during the early Middle Ages attained to a degree of artistic and material culture superior to that found in any other part of the Scandinavian North during this period.[8]

Influence of Commerce upon the Growth of Towns

In spite of the persistence of country markets at a distance from municipal centers, commercial activity served as a powerful stimulus to the growth of towns, and many of them came into existence during the viking period. Most of the early ones had the same names and the same sites as at the present time; and in more than one case heathen graves have been found outside of modern Scandinavian villages.[9] Practically every one of the earliest towns grew up about one or another of the large Northern markets.

The best example of these early commercial towns was perhaps Birka, situated in eastern Sweden upon the Island of Bjorkö in Lake Mälar. The site was shel-

[6] These included one hundred and eighty pieces from the Eastern Empire, fourteen thousand English coins, and twenty-three thousand bearing Arabian stamps, as well as a scattering from other places. Bugge, "Handel," in Hoops, *Reallexikon.*

[7] *Ibid.*.

[8] Bugge, *Vesterlandenes Indflydelse,* 402; Klintberg, M., *Några Anteckningar om Gotland i Verkligheten och Gotland i Skrift.*

[9] Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times,* 145.

Swedish Towns

tered and possessed an excellent harbor connected by water with the Gulf of Bothnia. The Northmen were well versed in the science of building redoubts and fortifications in the early part of the ninth century when the town seems to have been built; consequently every effort was made to give it ample protection.[10] The entrance to the haven was fortified and the town was surrounded by a wall of stone and earth, and guarded by a tower. In spite of this, however, it was often plundered by robbers for the wealth which it was known to possess;[11] yet it continued to be during the ninth and the first half of the tenth century the leading commercial center of the Swedish mainland.[12] But the enemies of the place succeeded in permanently destroying it by fire, presumably in the latter half of the tenth century.[13]

To take the place of Birka, Sigtuna soon rose a few miles to the northeast and became the commercial metropolis of this part of the North.[14] And at about the same period a number of other towns appeared in Sweden; but most of them were less fortunately situated than Sigtuna, and, consequently, did not attain to as great prosperity as it for a considerable time enjoyed. The best known of these medieval Swedish towns were probably Linköping, Skenninge, Falköping, Enköping, Strängnäs, Nyköping, Norrköping, Söderköping, and Östra Aros.[15] The commercial origin of the majority

[10] Schück, Henry, *Birka*, 5.

[11] Bugge, Alexander, "Die nordeuropäischen Verkehrswege im frühen Mittelalter," in *Vierteljahrschrift* für Social-und Wirtschaftsgeschichte, vol. IV, pt. II, 235.

[12] Bugge, "Handel," in Hoops, *Reallexikon*, II, 420.

[13] Bugge, "Nordeuropäischen Verkehrswege," in *Vierteljahrschrift* für Social-und Wirtschaftsgeschichte, vol. IV, pt. II, 235.

[14] Bugge, "Handel," in Hoops, *Reallexikon*, II, 420–421.

[15] Stjerna, *Lund och Birka*, 206.

of these places is indicated by the termination "köping," meaning "market."

The town of Uppsala early came into existence, but its origin was primarily due to the fact that the most famous temple of the whole of Scandinavia formed its nucleus. It was also the political capital of medieval Sweden. However, the annual fairs of a week's duration held in connection with the political and religious gatherings doubtless did much towards stimulating the growth of the place.[16]

Danish Towns

In Denmark, as in Sweden, the first towns rose in the earliest years of the viking time. The most of them had their origin directly in trade, and those attaining to the greatest fame were situated upon the main commercial thoroughfares connecting with the long river highways of the present northern Germany. The best known of these early trading centers was doubtless Hedeby, or Schleswig,[17] upon Schleifjord, in southeastern Jutland. This town seems to have been founded by the king of Denmark in the year 808, and became the seat of one of the earliest Danish mints.[18] Dating from about the same time was Ribe, on the west coast of Jutland, some distance northward of Hedeby. Though of less importance, commercially, than the latter, most of the Danish trade with the west passed through this wind-blown port.[19]

Of perhaps a little later date were Aarhuus and Viborg,

[16] Lehmann, "Kauffriede und Friedensschild," in *Germanistische Abhandlungen*, 50.

[17] In the Icelandic sagas it was called Hedeby, the "by," or town, upon the "heiðr," or heath; but the name Schleswig—probably German in origin—was also applied to it, and this survived while the Scandinavian name soon disappeared. Bugge, "Handel," in Hoops, *Reallexikon*.

[18] Bugge, "Handel," in Hoops, *Reallexikon;* Stjerna, *Lund och Birka*, 217.

[19] Stjerna, *Lund och Birka*, 208.

farther north in Jutland and upon the eastern side.[20] As its name indicates, Viborg was the seat of a temple in the heathen time. Roskilde, upon the island of Seeland, probably came into existence late in the ninth century, but it soon gained, and long held, a place of prominence, through being the seat of one of the earliest Danish bishoprics, and of one of the first mints in the Scandinavian North. It also preceded Copenhagen by some centuries as the capital of united Denmark.[21]

The southern portion of the Swedish peninsula was under Danish dominion during the Middle Ages, and here King Canute the Great founded the town of Lund in the first part of the eleventh century. In the time of its founder, Lund was the leading minting city of Denmark; and it was also important commercially and as the seat of a Christian archbishop.[22]

Norwegian Towns

Though Norway possessed several large and important market-places at an early date, the first towns of that country did not appear until about a century after the earliest ones of Sweden and Denmark. Tunsberg, the oldest Norwegian city, came into existence about the year 900 upon Christiania Fiord, taking the place of the old country market of Skiringssal. Near it soon rose Westfold, upon the same body of water. These southern ports were thronged with merchants during winter as well as summer.[23] Vigen was another important market town of southern Norway.[24]

In western Norway, about half way up the coast, was Nidaros, founded by King Olaf Tryggvasson in 997, very

[20] Bugge, "Handel," in Hoops, *Reallexikon.*
[21] Stjerna, *Lund och Birka,* 206.
[22] *Ibid.,* 203, 217.
[23] Bugge, "Handel," in Hoops, *Reallexikon.*
[24] Petersen, *Gammel-Nordiske Geografi,* 108.

close to the site of the present Trondhjem; but it owed its importance rather to the large amount of Icelandic trade which passed through it than to any domestic stimulus.[25] Still farther north were two other early commercial towns; but with the rise into prominence of Oslo and Bergen in the southwestern part of the Norwegian peninsula, under Olaf the Holy, these places, and Nidaros as well, lost much of their trade, for the products of Haalogaland, within the Polar Circle, were now sent to southern Norway to be disposed of instead of being sold in the markets of the Far North.[26]

Character of Early Scandinavian Towns

Throughout the Middle Ages, towns existed in the Scandinavian lands only for the sake of the country dwellers. Therefore, town life was merely a modification of country life, and the arrangement of town buildings was largely an adaptation from rural dwellings. For the sake of defense, particularly against sea-robbers, most of the towns were probably walled and supplied with redoubts and watch towers;[27] but as the populations of even the largest of the Scandinavian towns of the period perhaps did not exceed a few thousand, the inclosing ramparts were not extensive.

In the commercial towns of the early Middle Ages there was usually only one street, which, if the place was on the coast, ran along the water's edge; and from it narrow alleys or "crossings"—called "almenning" in Norway—ran up to the houses, which stood as a rule with gable ends out.[28] The most important public gath-

[25] Bugge, Alexander, *Nidaros's Handel og Skibsfart i Middelalder.*

[26] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 109; Bugge, "Seafaring and Shipping during the Viking Age," in *Saga-Book*, vol. VI, 16.

[27] Schück, *Birka*, 5.

[28] Bugge, *Vesterlandenes Indflydelse*, 203–205; Mathiesen, Henr., *Det Gamle Throndhjem*, 46.

ering places in the ancient cities were the heathen temples or Christian churches, and the markets. The latter, especially if the town was upon the coast, were generally along the main street on the water-front; here the buyers and sellers set up temporary booths, or displayed their wares upon rude counters out in the open air. But in the interior of the land the street was generally a continuation of the main road leading to the town, and was, consequently, generally in the middle of the town. If this was the case, the market place was usually a widening of the street into a square, called a *torg,* to which the traders brought their wares for sale.

In the early Middle Ages no merchant gilds in the medieval sense were to be found in the towns of Scandinavia; neither was there a burgher class, as distinguished from country dwellers. And it was not until the close of the eleventh century that any distinction was made between town law and country law.[29]

Markets and Towns in Greater Scandinavia

As a direct result of Scandinavian commercial activity, new markets and towns rose and old ones increased greatly in importance beyond the borders of the strictly Scandinavian lands. This influence was seen in East and West alike. Ladoga—called by the Scandinavians Aldeigenborg—Neva, and Wolchow, Novgorod, —known among the Northmen as Holmgaard—and Kiev, all in Scandinavian Russia and upon the internal water routes to Constantinople, were in existence primarily as a result of the mercantile zeal of the Northmen. Kiev, upon the lower Dnieper, was the most important of these commercial towns within the borders of Greater Scandinavia, and was possessed of eight different market

[29] Lehmann, Karl, "Burger," in Hoops, *Reallexikon.*

places.[30] At the annual fairs in the towns of Scandinavian Russia, and also in those held in country places along the main trade highways, a tremendous amount of traffic took place. Scandinavian merchants here exchanged the raw products of the North for the manufactured ones of southeastern Europe and Asia. Great fortunes in furs, in particular, were given in return for the luxuries of the Orient.[31]

Before the ninth century the Scandinavians had established merchant colonies upon the south and east coasts of the Baltic.[32] And in the last half of the tenth, the Danes conquered the island of Wollin at the mouth of the Oder, and established upon it the strongly fortified city of Jomsborg, in the walls of which were twelve towers. It remained under Danish control for seventy years and became the stronghold of the Jomsborg vikings.[33] During the eleventh century Jomsborg was the commercial center of the Baltic and was called by Adam of Bremen the greatest city of Europe.[34]

With Hamburg upon the Elbe and the Carolingian city of Dorestad upon the Rhine, the Scandinavians traded extensively and did much towards stimulating the growth and prosperity of these places; but their influence was felt far more, commercially and otherwise, in the British Isles, because of the Scandinavian settlements there. This was true on an especially large scale of the Danelaw, in northeastern England, where were situated the strongly fortified "five boroughs" of Nottingham, Lincoln, Leicester, Stamford, and Derby. Some of these

30 Bugge, "Handel," in Hoops, *Reallexikon.*
31 Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 99.
32 Bugge, "Seafaring and Shipping during the Viking Age," in *Saga-Book*, vol. VI, pt. I, 17.
33 *Jómsvikinga Saga, passim.*
34 Bugge, "Handel," in Hoops, *Reallexikon*, II, 426.

towns undoubtedly existed before the Scandinavian conquest, but commercial stimulus from the North greatly increased their wealth and power; others, however, were either founded by the Northmen, or came so strongly under their influence as to be given Scandinavian names.[35] Other towns which were virtually founded by the Scandinavians were Whitby, Grimsby and Swansea. Old cities, like London and Bristol, were undoubtedly much stimulated by the presence of Scandinavian merchants. And in Ireland the cities of Limerick, Waterford, and Cork were practically made by the trade of the Northmen settled there;[36] while Dublin existed as a distinctly Norwegian city for about three hundred years.[37]

Services Performed by Semi-Scandinavian Cities

The cities of the British Isles under Scandinavian domination not only sent out much home produce, but also, like Kiev and Novgorod and the other commercial centers in Scandinavian Russia, formed half-way trading and shipping stations between Scandinavia and the lands more remote. The Northern merchants who had settled in the British Isles brought the exports of southwestern Europe and Moorish Africa to these cities, particularly to those of Ireland, and here they were frequently landed and re-shipped to Scandinavia. In a similar manner, the exports from the North intended for the western Mediterranean region or Africa were often passed through the British Isles.[38]

In some of the foreign cities in which they traded extensively, such as London, the Scandinavian seamen

[35] The termination "by," found in many names of British towns, is the Scandinavian word for "town."

[36] Bugge, "Handel," in Hoops, *Reallexikon.*

[37] Vogt, L. J., *Dublin som Norsk By.*

[38] Bugge, "Handel," in Hoops, *Reallexikon;* Bugge, *Vesterlandenes Indflydelse,* 183–185.

and merchants appear to have lived in colonies by themselves in certain sections. And here, before the middle of the eleventh century, they had their own churches and, presumably, their own halls where they met as gilds; for though merchant gilds did not come into existence in Scandinavia itself until a later date, when abroad, the Northern merchants organized, in imitation of other traders. Even in Novgorod, which possessed many Scandinavian characteristics, the merchants from the island of Gotland had their special gild hall and their own church, which was dedicated to the Norwegian saint-king, Olaf the Holy.[39]

Scandinavian Merchant Colonies in Foreign Cities

[39] Bugge, "Die nordeuropäischen Verkehrswege," in *Vierteljahrschrift* für Social-und Wirtschaftsgeschichte, vol. IV, pt. II, 251, 261.

CHAPTER XV

THE CAREER OF THE VIKING; WEAPONS AND WARFARE

He only might with full truth be called a sea-king that never slept under a sooty rafter, and never drank in the chimney corner.

Ynglinga Saga.

In order to understand the military phase of the viking period, it is necessary to have the point of view of the Northman. To him, the ideal life was one of activity; to perform deeds calling for physical strength and courage, mental alertness, and skill in self-preservation was really a part of his religion. Warlikeness, for its own sake, the Northman believed to be a virtue of such high degree as to bring him special recognition from the gods in the life beyond the grave. For, was there not prepared for the warrior in Asgard the great and splendid Valhalla, in connection with which were opportunities for exercising martial skill and satisfying love for fighting utterly unknown to man on the mortal side of the tomb? Therefore, to be "sword-dead," or even "sea-dead," was vastly more honorable than to be "sick-dead." [1]

Ideals of the Viking

The love for adventure and the deep desire to gain a "good report," which military achievement would guarantee, doubtless were powerful motives for the choice

[1] The belief that persons dying a natural death—even though their careers had been military—would not be admitted to Valhalla, sometimes caused warriors upon their death-beds to perform a heathen rite calculated to gain for them the same reward as the man received who died fighting. This they did by marking themselves upon the breast with a spear's point so that the blood flowed, thus dedicating themselves to Odin, the god of war. "Geirr," in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary.

of a military career; but it should be borne in mind also that, in spite of the emphasis placed upon the ownership of land, and the devotion to ancestral soil, the Scandinavians of the early Middle Ages attached a dignity to the possession of movable property which is not now generally recognized. Hence, the hope for rich booty also served as a powerful lure to the would-be viking. And that the desire to secure wealth for the sake of the honor and glory which the display of it would bring—rather than because of real need—was what led men to "go harrying over the seas" is clear from the abundant evidence we have that many or most of the leaders of the pirate expeditions were high-born men of substance.

The fact that they acquired their additional riches through pillage and murder in the territory of their neighbors to the south proved no deterrent; for the ethical code of the Europe of the period largely taught that the foreigner was legitimate prey, particularly if he worshipped alien gods. And yet, the standards of right and wrong of the Northmen of the tenth century, as regards piracy, were but little different from those displayed by high-class Englishman six hundred years later; the former attacked all foreign lands which failed to buy them off, while Sir Francis Drake and his school restricted their depredations to the commerce and the territory of Roman Catholic Spain in the Old World and the New. The earlier freebooters had all of the courage and daring of the later ones, and perhaps were no more cruel and lawless than they; both classes were the products of the times in which they lived.

As a rule, the Scandinavians took part in viking raids only in their younger years, beginning early by way of finishing off their educations. After they had gained wealth and fame, they retired to a more quiet and uni-

form life, to be succeeded by their sons, who begged them for war-ships and equipment, in order that they, in turn, might embark upon piratical voyages. Men from all sections of Scandinavia joined in the viking raids; and every land in Europe, as well as some in western Asia and northern Africa repeatedly fell victims to them: German and Frenchman, Anglo-Saxon and Irish, Arab and Longobard, Finn and Slav, Bulgarian and Greek—all came, during the period of greatest viking activity, to know by bitter experience the Northern race.[2] And in their helplessness before the dreaded foe, some of the peoples of western Europe introduced into their litany the fervent supplication: "Save us, O Lord, from the fury of the Northmen!"

Viking Routes

For long stretches of time some of the nearer-lying foreign lands were annually visited and ravaged by the professional pirates. The French and western German lands and the British Isles, in particular, were regular sufferers, for it was easily possible to make extensive raids upon them during the summer time and to return home with the desired plunder before the arrival of winter storms. Piratical expeditions to these favorite western lands were commonly known as the "víking," or the "western viking" (*vestr-víking*); while, plundering raids to the East—which, if the warriors went far afield, usually took one or more years to complete—were referred to as "going in the eastern way" (*fara í Austrveg*).

During the earlier part of the viking period each piratical party was generally made up of but few men, the idea being that the fewer the plunderers, the greater the share of spoils for each. But as time passed and the victim-nations learned to some extent to guard against

[2] Steenstrup, *Normannerne*, I, 1.

their raids, the Scandinavians came to appreciate the advantages of confederation, not only because of the greater protection against defensive attacks but because a union of forces made possible more ambitious undertakings, such as the siege of Paris. Now, great fleets co-operated. At Paris there were seven hundred large-sized war ships with a proportional number of provision boats; and the warriors taking part in the attack totalled forty thousand.[3] Such vast fleets,—led by the showy dragon ships filled with men unknown to fear, and the equals of any in Europe as warriors,—might well strike terror to the hearts of those upon whose coasts they unexpectedly appeared.

Coöperative Organization of the Pirates

Another result of experience in piratical occupations was the rise of a small class of men whose sole business was warfare and piracy. Of these the best example is furnished by the Jomsborg vikings who possessed a fleet of one hundred and eighty ships, and lived in strongly fortified quarters under a special set of regulations which they themselves drew up and agreed to. This viking law limited the membership to men of unusual strength, between the ages of eighteen and fifty. The confederates must live in harmony and show no fear; to flee before an enemy of equal power or like arms was forbidden. No man might bind up his wounds before they were twenty-four hours old. And each member of the organization must avenge the others as if they were his own brothers. The spoils of war secured by each must be taken to a certain place, where they would be divided fairly when the battle was ended; whoever violated this rule should be banished

The Jomsborg Vikings

[3] *Ibid.*, 352–353; Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 182.

from the league. Women might not be taken into the viking stronghold, and neither women nor children should be taken prisoners.[4]

The Varangians

Other Northmen who had had experience in fighting, usually on viking expeditions, became professional soldiers in the employ of foreign rulers. Because of their fearlessness and their military skill, they were in special demand as body guards. Some warriors found such personal service near home in Scotland and England, but more were drawn to Constantinople, where they formed the famous Varangian guard of the Greek emperor, which numbered about three hundred men. These Scandinavian mercenaries were, naturally, hated by the jealous Greeks, who called them the emperor's "treasures," because he took such good care of them, and permitted them, in return for the payment of a special toll, to make piratical raids upon the coasts and islands of the eastern Mediterranean. But the Varangians, like the other vikings, as a rule, after having won wealth and fame, returned to Scandinavia to spend their declining years.[5]

The Ship-Levy and Royal Fleets

Though for a long time almost invincible whether on sea or land, the water was the Northman's special element, where as a warrior he excelled all other soldiers of Europe. Hence, the Scandinavian kings gave much attention to the building and equipment of war vessels, a description of which has been presented in a previous chapter. The common means by which the royal fleet was kept up was the ship-levy, well known to England during the period of the early Stuarts. In the time of Haakon the Good in Norway the coast lands "as far

[4] *Jómsvikinga Saga*, 15.

[5] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 106–107.

inland as the salmon swims'' were divided into ship-raths, or districts, and the population in each district was required to supply a certain number of vessels for national warfare. By such a ship levy, and also by other methods, great fleets were placed at the disposal of the sovereign in time of war.[6] Canute the Great sailed to England with one thousand vessels.[7] Such fleets were capable of transporting large armies, for the average war ship perhaps carried considerably more than one hundred fighting men, and some carried several hundred. Olaf Tryggvasson's renowned vessel, the *Long Serpent,* the largest ship of its time in Norway, carried nearly one thousand men in all; but the capacity of this vessel greatly exceeded that of the average.[8]

The Berserkers

Every fleet was manned with two classes—warriors, trained to fight, and mariners, whose business it was to equip and sail the vessels; under both were usually thralls. A peculiar class of fighting men, the berserkers,[9] were often given positions of unusual importance upon the ships, because of their superior ability as warriors, and were also preferred by many Scandinavian kings and nobles as body-guards, for the same reason. They were rough, wild warriors who fought with such utter abandon that while in battle they were at times seized with fits of frenzy, called *berserksgangr.* During the attack, the hair rose on their heads and they howled like wild animals and bit on their shields. And at such times they were twice as strong as normal, and were popularly believed to be

[6] *Saga Library,* III, 173.

[7] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben,* 126.

[8] Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times,* 184.

[9] The name was probably derived from *bär,* "bear," and *sark,* "shirt," due to the fact that in ancient times athletes and champions used to wear the skins of bears, wolves, and other animals.

proof against fire and steel; hence, they wrought great havoc amongst the enemy. But when the fit had passed, they were weak and exhausted.[10]

This peculiar transformation seems to have been to a great extent of nervous origin. Self-hypnotism and the failure to exercise self-control doubtless aided in bringing it on. It perhaps corresponded very closely to the mental and physical condition among the Malays, which causes them to "run amuck." [11]

Summons to War

Various methods were used in the Scandinavian countries to call the warriors to active service. A general summons was occasionally given by lighting bonfires upon the tops of the mountains. Those who saw the fires kindled others farther on, thus spreading the message.[12] But a more usual way of rallying the fighting men seems to have been to send throughout the country or district the "war arrow" which was "sheared up" [13] by the king or military leader, and was passed on from one community to another by relays of bearers, like the Celtic "fiery cross" described in Scott's *Lady of the Lake*. All of the able-bodied men in the households to which the summons came must, on pain of punishment, equip themselves with arms and supplies and gather for battle.[14]

[10] *Egils Saga*, 29–30, 84, 212.

[11] Bugge, *Norges Historie*, vol. I, pt. II. 112–113. Under the subject of witchcraft, Olaus Magnus describes what appears to be the same phenomenon. King Holdanus of Sweden, he says, had seven sons "who were such cunning Witches, that they would suddenly in a force of fury rore horribly, bite bucklers, eat down burning Coles, go through any fires that were made; nor could this motion of madness be allayed but either by Bonds, or by shedding of man's blood." *History of the Goths, Swedes, & Vandals*, 47.

[12] *Saga Library*, III, 173.

[13] Originally, "shear up" appears to have meant literally to cut with a knife a piece of wood in the form of an arrow, to be used as a summons to war. More customarily, however, it merely meant to send out the arrow as a token, to assemble the warriors. *Egils Saga*, 9, note.

[14] *Saga Library*, III, 176, 309; *Egils Saga*, 9. According to Olaus

As regards both offensive and defensive weapons, the Scandinavians were, on the whole, better equipped than their neighbors to the south; and this, notwithstanding the fact that many of the finest and best weapons were imported.[15] The most common instrument of combat of the Northman was his sword, and it was also his favorite. The fact that the finest swords had suggestive individual names, such as Earth-House-Loom, Venom Switch, War-Flame, and Leg-Biter, shows how highly they were prized. Some of them, as Greysteel, were believed to be charmed and capable of biting anything.[16] The magical power was produced by the aid of witches, or through words of enchantment carved upon the blade.

Weapons of Offense: Swords

Both one-edged and two-edged swords were used, but the latter were best known, and both kinds were commonly wielded with only one hand. The weapons with two edges possessed a deep groove down the middle of the blade, along which the blood ran. The average length of the swords employed during the viking period was perhaps a little more than thirty inches, but some of the most famous ones were so long and heavy that it took a powerful man to wield them, when using both hands. Great variation is noticeable in the quality of metal used for the blades; some of the swords bent like tin, while others were of the finest steel and sprang back after being bent double. The blades of best quality were at times damasked and engraved with the names of the smiths making them; and the handles were often of bronze, silver, or gold,

Magnus, a similar method of calling the warriors to battle was employed in Sweden considerably later. A staff three hands long was carried by a speedy runner to the various towns with the command that within a stipulated time every young man over fifteen years old should come with arms and food to battle. *History of the Goths, Swedes, & Vandals*, 95.

[15] Bugge, *Vesterlandenes Indflydelse*, 208.

[16] *Gísla Saga*, 2.

richly chased, and occasionally set with gems. The scabbard was usually of wood covered with leather, and was suspended from the belt or from the shoulder by means of a strap.[17] Perhaps the finest swords came from the Orient, but some excellent ones were brought from France and England also.[18] Great numbers of these weapons were, however, manufactured in Scandinavia, and some of them, copied from foreign models, were of excellent workmanship.[19]

Spears

Though not as popular as the sword, the spear was in very common use, and was made in two general styles, for throwing and for stabbing. In both kinds the head was made of iron or steel, though bronze was at times used, and the shaft was generally of ash. Different varieties of heads appeared, some being long and bladelike, and others having sharp, backward-pointing prongs, like fishhooks, while still others displayed characteristics of a different nature. The casting spear was lighter than that used at close range; the head as well as the shaft was shorter. And often the former part was attached very lightly to the handle by means of a single nail, which could be removed before the weapon was thrown, in order that the enemy could not so readily cast it back. As in the case of the sword, the spear head was often decorated with precious metals, and the wooden shaft was carved with runes having the power to charm and thus aid the physical efforts of the owner of the weapon in his struggle against the enemy.[20]

The warrior used both hands in wielding the stabbing spear, but the throwing spear seems to have been shot

[17] Falk, *Waffenkunde*, 9–37; Gustafson, *Norges Oldtid*, 101–102.
[18] Bugge, *Vesterlandenes Indflydelse*, 208.
[19] Falk, *Waffenkunde*, 38–41; Gustafson, *Norges Oldtid*, 102.
[20] Falk, *Waffenkunde*, 66–89.

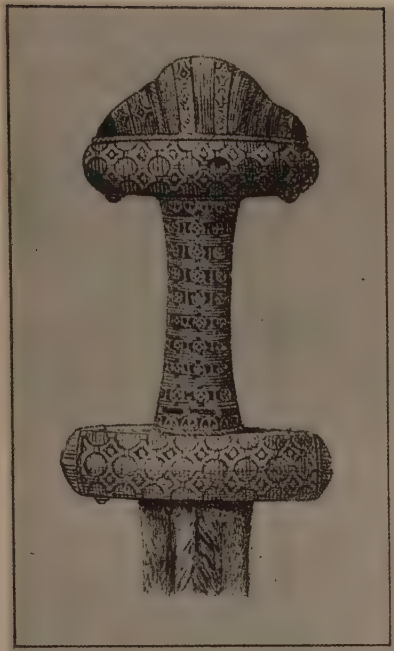


Fig. 36. Sword with a Decorated Handle. (From Müller's *Vor Oldtid*)

Fig. 37. Decorated Helmet of Iron and Bronze, from Sixth Century, A. D.

Fig. 38. Playing Piece Representing a Berserker with a Long Shield. (From Bugge's *Norges Historie*)

with but one hand. The Northmen at times displayed great dexterity in the use of the latter weapon, some being able to throw two spears at once, by holding one in each hand. Mention is also made in the ancient records of Scandinavians who caught the flying spears of the enemy and hurled them back at the senders.[21]

Bows and Arrows

Bows and arrows were used, but seem to have been less general than swords and spears. They were probably more often the weapon of the huntsman than of the warrior, especially in the more remote parts of the North. Bent wood, usually yew, but also elm, formed the bow, the ends of which were often finished with decorative metal. The bowstring was made from the hides or sinews of animals as a rule, but some were of wool, and less often, of flax. Metal composed the arrow heads, which were shaped in various fashions, like the spears, but smaller in size.[22]

Clubs

The club was at times carried by the humbler classes, but it served more as a weapon of defense while the people were engaged in their daily pacific tasks than as an instrument of formal warfare. It was fashioned from a piece of hardwood, made still harder by being thrust into the fire, or having the thick end spiked or covered with a coating of metal.[23]

Battle-axes

The most characteristic weapon of the Scandinavian North was the deadly battle-ax, which was but little known in the lands to the south until introduced there by the vikings. At an earlier time this ax was probably the chief weapon of the Northern warrior, but by the Viking Age it was to some extent supplanted by the sword. The pride of the warrior in his

[21] *Ibid.*, 90.
[22] *Ibid.*, 91–103.
[23] *Ibid.*, 120–123.

battle-ax, as in his sword, was shown by bestowing upon it an individual name and by the rich ornamentation of the blade, which was occasionally embellished with gold and silver wrought into beautiful patterns (Fig. 35).

There were more than a half dozen different styles of these weapons, some of which showed foreign influence, but the light "hand ax" of conventional shape was probably the favorite form. The "broad ax," the character of which was indicated by its name, was also a common type. Other well-known varieties were the "snag ax,"

Fig. 35. Danish Battle-Ax with Design in Silver. (From Müller's *Vor Oldtid.*)

a halberdlike implement having no hammer extension; the "bearded ax," possessing a broad blade with a long beardlike projection; and the "war demon," another lance-shaped weapon, with a pike on top.[24]

Defensive Equipment: Helmets

Carefully made instruments for defense in battle were employed in the North at a very early time. Even in the first part of the Iron Age warriors protected their heads by means of metal helmets, decorated upon the crests with

[24] *Ibid.*, 104–120; *Origines Islandicae*, II, 310.

figures of animals and supplied with nose-guards and shields for the sides of the face (Fig. 37).[25] But by the earlier part of the Middle Ages such elaborately constructed head-gear appears to have been rarely worn for purposes of protection; its function was primarily decorative, or to indicate social standing, as in the case of chieftains. Sometimes such helmets were gilded or gold plated. Towards the close of the Viking Age protective head coverings again became more common. Some of them resembled the earlier forms, with elaborately decorated crests and extensions for the face, but the more usual style was simpler, and resembled a metal hat or cap very similar to that worn by the American soldiers in the World War.[26]

Armor

The main part of the warrior's body was protected in prehistoric times with armor of leather, usually of ox hides; but chain armor was worn in Scandinavia as early as the fourth century after Christ; and in the early Middle Ages it was probably very common, though protective leathern shirts were also worn, and sometimes heavy linen garments. For the coat of mail, rings of iron were used, the metal links at times fashioned into as many as four thicknesses. These iron shirts were made with short, wide sleeves and reached to about the middle of the thighs. At the top was a small opening for the head, which was closed with a buckle or cord at the neck. In winter a large cloak was worn over this armor. Iron guards for the knees were in use, and the legs were covered with heavy leather

[25] Hildebrand, Hans, "Hjelmar med Vildsvinsbild," in *Maanadsblad*, 1879, pp. 1–3; Stjerna, Knut, "Draktskatten i Beowulf," in *Fornvännen*, I 141.

[26] Falk, *Waffenkunde*, 155–167; Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 138. This readoption of armor was perhaps due to influence from the South.

or with woven iron links, while gloves of similar material protected the hands.[27]

Shields

Shields were in very general use and were of two different styles, round and oblong, which differed in effectiveness. The former was light, and not always invulnerable to the sharpest and strongest weapons (Fig. 39). It measured about two feet in diameter and was made of wood, often linden, reinforced at the back with metal. The boss for the protection of the hand grasping the handle beneath it was also of metal; and the edge of the circle was bound with leather or with iron or bronze. The long shield was large enough to cover the whole body of the warrior when he knelt behind it, and some extra-sized ones were also made which would protect several men. These more effective shields were constructed of wood covered with ox hide, and, like the others, were strengthened by means of metal. The shields were decorated in various ways, though the smaller ones were probably the more ornamental of the two. The metal finishings were often gilded, and occasionally inlaid with gold or silver; and the wooden surface was painted, most frequently in bright red; but blue, black, and yellow, as well as other colors and combinations of colors, were displayed. Sometimes decorative borders were painted on the

Fig. 39. Small Wooden Shield with a Metal Boss. (From Montelius' *Kulturgischichte Schwedens.*)

[27] Falk, *Waffenkunde*, 174–191; Worsaae, *De Danskes Kultur i Vikingetiden*, 24.

shields, and their surfaces embellished with emblematic figures, as dragons or ravens (Fig. 38).[28]

Naval Warfare

The fights between the Scandinavian nations themselves took place as a rule upon the water, and the combatants were well matched, for all sections of the North were highly skilled in naval warfare. The total fleet of one side was often composed of two or three smaller fleets. Consequently, the death of one commander did not result in serious disaster to the navy as a whole. It was customary to fasten the bows of the vessels forming a fleet together before battle opened, which action made it possible for the warriors to move with ease from one ship to another.[29]

When fighting at long range, the warriors at times sought protection behind a breastwork of wood erected along the sides of the vessel; and from here they hurled their darts and spears at the enemy; while the men stationed in the topcastle, found on some war vessels, fought in the same manner, or cast volleys of stones down upon their opponents.[30] In order to get closer to a weakening foe, the Northmen, like the Romans, employed grappling hooks, by means of which they drew the vessels closer to their own, making it possible to board them. War ships were also usually supplied with iron beaks which were rammed into enemy vessels, thus scuttling and sinking them.

Land Warfare

Between the Scandinavians and their neighbors to the south land-warfare was the almost exclusive rule until near the close of the viking period, for the other peoples of western Europe were un-

[28] Falk, *Waffenkunde*, 126–151; *Saga Library*, II, 22; III, 278.
[29] Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 185.
[30] Falk, *Waffenkunde*, 196–197.

trained in sea-fighting; and their failure to realize the necessity for meeting the Northern Pirates upon their own element was the primary reason for the prolongation of the viking period.[31] As a result of great secrecy and swiftness in their movements, the Northmen could land in the country which they desired to attack and take the enemy completely by surprise, thus having them entirely at their mercy. The rapidity of their advance after disembarking was due partly to good organization and concerted action; but the fact that they regularly helped themselves to horses in the districts traversed and used them for transportation purposes made it much easier to take their victims unawares as well as to carry away great amounts of plunder.[32] Sometimes they brought horses with them, particularly in the later part of the period considered, when they operated on an extensive scale. Now,—as still later, in connection with the Norman conquest,—horses were carried across the Channel from the French coast for use in England.[33]

Plunder

Inasmuch as the first aim of the vikings in the early period of their invasions was to enrich themselves with booty, they rarely failed to sack the churches and monasteries and to carry away the gold and silver vessels and all else of value on which they could lay their hands, for they early learned that in the buildings devoted to the services of the Christian religion rich treasures could be found. But in their search for plunder they also attacked private houses; and they often stole recently-harvested grain, wine, live-stock, and

[31] Steenstrup, *Normannerne*, I, 265.

[32] *Ibid.*, 358–359.

[33] *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 360. The Bayeux Tapestry shows horses in the ships of the Normans.

other food products. These they consumed while in the land of the enemy or carried off to the North.[34]

Yet, much as the Northmen sought booty, their love of fighting for its own sake led them always to welcome battle, unless—as was rarely the case—the odds were heavily against them. The men from a single ship appear to have usually formed the tactical unit, and were led by the captain under whom they served upon the water, the second in command being the second officer of the vessel. Such units were grouped into battalions and brigades under the banner of the chieftain or king who, as chief commander of the fleet, had filled somewhat the capacity of the modern admiral.[35] Though they fought well in rectangular grouping, the Northmen's most effective organization for battle was the *svin-fylking,* or swine-array —a heavy wedge of men, the first line of which was composed of two picked warriors. Such a formation could usually plow its way through the most formidable battle line.[36]

Military Organization

In preparation for the attack—if the enemy took the initiative—the man who bore the battle standard set it up promptly, on an eminence if one was near. This ensign was either the figure of an animal of emblematic significance, set upon a pole, or a banner of cloth, commonly blood red, with the symbol of the confederates embroidered or painted upon it. The raven, as Odin's bird, was a favorite figure, and was used by the sons of the greatest of all vikings, Ragnar Ladbrok. About this standard the warriors ral-

Opening of Battle

[34] Steenstrup, *Normannerne,* I, 372–373.

[35] Collingwood, W. G., *Scandinavian Britain,* 40–41.

[36] The Highlanders of Scotland were massed in this deadly triangle at the battle of Preston Pans. *Ibid.,* 86.

lied.[37] The trumpeter blew a loud blast upon his lure; the vikings uttered a wild, barbaric yell, calculated to strike terror in the hearts of the enemy, or gave the customary war-cry; and the conflict had opened.[38] Before and during the battle, Odin, the god of war, and other favorite divinities, as well, were invoked by the warriors for aid in the contest; and sacrifices and vows were made to them in return for military success.[39]

Strategy

Though well equipped with weapons, offensive and defensive, the Northmen were generally victorious less because of this than in consequence of their skill in warlike operations themselves. Their effective wedge-formation which is an instance of this, has just been mentioned. They also displayed a remarkable degree of strategic cunning, and distinct superiority in the art of besieging. They were nothing if not resourceful. By means of spies and bribery they learned everything possible about the land which they proposed to invade, in order to use their strongest weapon—surprise. Another element of their strength in this regard was concealment and disguise. The *camouflage* resorted to by both sides in the World War was but a highly developed form of the deceptive devices used by the Northmen a thousand years before. In order to land in an enemy country without being detected, they sometimes covered their vessels with the branches of trees down to the water's edge in such a manner as to make them resemble wooded islands; and while upon the march also they sometimes hid themselves behind these screens of branches.[40] It seems probable that the trick

[37] Steenstrup, *Normannerne*, I, 359.
[38] *Ibid.*, 362–363; *Egils Saga*, 64.
[39] Steenstrup, *Normannerne*, I, 362–363.
[40] Falk, *Waffenkunde*, 194–196; *Saga Library*, IV, 49.

by which McDuff made "Birnam Forest come to Dunsinane" in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was of Scandinavian origin. Sometimes the invaders covered their approach and protected themselves from attack by means of trenches. But, as a result of their rare gift of adaptability, they also made use of every existing element of favor in a situation. Ridges, rocks, and woods became their ramparts at a moment's notice, and it is recorded that once, for want of something better, they built a redoubt of slaughtered animals and retreated behind this to their ships.[41]

By means of various other crafty devices they also deceived the enemy; they dug and skillfully covered deep pits into which the foe walked; they pretended to be asleep, as in the fight between Rollo and the Franks, until the enemy was upon them, then jumped up and cut him down; they drew close together and knelt behind their shields, to appear few in numbers; and when caught unawares they at times threw themselves flat upon the ground and covered themselves with their shields. When hardest pressed upon the field of battle, they quickly formed a "shield-fortress" which was almost always impregnable. This "fortress" resembled the Roman *testudo* and was formed by the warriors pressing close together, some standing, others kneeling, in the form of a hollow cylinder, with their shields overlapping like the shells of a tortoise.[42] But perhaps the most common trick employed by the Northern warriors, and the most successful, was pretended flight, by means of which they drew their opponents from the position of defense to one of pursuit; then abruptly turned upon them and renewed the attack. Largely as a result of this strategic

41 Steenstrup, *Normannerne*, I, 364.
42 *Ibid.*, 360, 366.

device, victory went to the Normans in the battle of Hastings.[43]

Siege

Especially adept were the Northmen in their ability to approach a city which they planned to capture, without harm to themselves, and while their intended victims gazed helplessly out upon them. For this purpose they often employed trenches, or advanced in the arrangement of the shield fortress; but they also had a device which was a defense during approach to the enemy walls and an instrument of attack when these were reached. This was a battering-ram made of a huge tree trunk mounted upon wheels, the platform upon which the tree was placed being strongly roofed, thus protecting the men when they drew or pushed the vehicle and when they operated the ram.[44]

Another machine used with great success in the capture of towns and castles was the catapult, operated on the principle of the sling-shot, the missiles being usually stones. This engine was presumably composed of a thrower, in the hollowed-out, spoon-shaped end of which the shot was laid, while the other end was fastened in the middle of a tightly-stretched, twisted rope or cord, securely attached to the foundation of the apparatus. The twisted rope gave spring and force to the thrower for hurling the missile.[45]

Cruelty of the Vikings

During the early period of their raids, the vikings were particularly disregardful of life, whether in plundering attacks or in open warfare. Neither sex nor age was spared; old men, women and babies were put to death, often in the cruelest manner.[46] The monks appear to have been unusual

[43] *Ibid.*, 366.
[44] Du Chaillu, *Viking Age*, I, 541.
[45] Falk, *Waffenkunde*, 192–193.
[46] An old account tells that the Northmen tossed the foreign children

sufferers, perhaps because they were representatives of a religion unfriendly to the divinities of the North as well as because they resisted the attacks of the heathen and tried to save their treasures. The enemy soldiers who fell into the hands of the vikings were usually put to death, sometimes by torture.[47] There is no reason to conclude, however, that the Northmen were more cruel than the people of the foreign lands which they attacked. Furthermore, in the World War so many instances of hideous ferocity were displayed by Christian nations as to preclude any conclusion that the Northmen were unique. It should be remembered also that we have not the vikings' side of the story. For the details with reference to the viking raids we are almost wholly dependent upon the accounts written by the Christian monks of the lands which the Northmen plundered. These writers hated and despised the invaders as heathen and barbarians just as they hated and despised the Mohammedans and Jews. This attitude did not tend to make them unprejudiced historians.[48]

Prisoners of War

In the latter part of the viking period the Northern warriors killed fewer and carried away more prisoners. People of prominence and wealth were taken for the sake of the ransom which they might bring; many others, some, often men and

in the air and caught them on their spears; but states that one of their number was so tender-hearted that he tried to stop the pastime, and thereby gained the nickname, Barna-Karl—"child-man," or "children's friend." *Origines Islandicae*, I, 225.

[47] An especially cruel practice to which the Northmen at times resorted was to "cut a blood-eagle." Incisions were made over the ribs in the form of an eagle, and the lungs were pulled out through the opening while the victim was still alive. This form of torture, however, seems to have been practiced only upon the man who had killed one's father, if taken in war. Such an execution was a sacrifice to Odin, the god of war. "Blöðörn," in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary.

[48] Collingwood, *Scandinavian Britain*, 63–64.

women of high rank, were made to serve as slaves in the land of their captors, or were sold in the great markets where traffic in human beings took place; frequently, also, women, especially beautiful ones, were taken to the North and became the wives or mistresses of their captors. With the prisoners were carried off trophies of victory —the banners of the enemy and the arms of their leaders, and also a rich collection of plunder. The bodies of their own dead, which must be left behind, the Scandinavians carefully buried upon the field of battle; but they displayed their scorn and contempt for the vanquished enemy by leaving the dead comrades of the latter unburied where they fell.[49]

[49] Steenstrup, *Normannerne*, I, 369–371.

CHAPTER XVI

GOVERNMENT

With law shall our land be built up and settled; with lawlessness, wasted and spoilt.

Saga of Burnt Njal.

In very early times virtually every separate geographical unit of continental Scandinavia constituted an independent political entity; each river valley, coastal plain, peninsula, and island had a distinct governmental system. But with the passing of the centuries these individual units were gradually combined under one rule, sometimes through mutual agreement, but more frequently as a result of the successful military campaigns of ambitious chieftains or aggressive kings. In consequence of these centralizing activities, by the close of the ninth century Denmark, Sweden, and Norway had attained to approximately the territorial dimensions maintained during most of the Middle Ages; and each country was from now on usually under the dominion of a single sovereign.

Administrative Evolution

The Icelandic commonwealth was a by-product of the movement towards political consolidation in Norway, which took place under King Harold Hairfair. Beginning about the year 874, large numbers of the best people in the land, unwilling to submit to the victorious king, fled to the bleak island far to the west, and here began life anew. For a few decades the exiles lived in scattered groups of tiny, independent democracies, more or

less separated by natural barriers, but the need for a central organization which could settle inter-community disputes and consider matters of common interest led, in 930, to the formation of the Icelandic republic, which functioned through the Althing, or general parliament. The political evolution requiring more than a thousand years in continental Scandinavia, was thus, through aid of example, effected by Iceland in fifty.

Yet, after centralization had been completed, the boundaries of the earlier political units were largely retained and were employed for purposes of local administration. These subdivisions were, however, probably never identical even in continental Scandinavia, and as time passed they became more differentiated. The smaller units, most of which developed from the *bygd,* or original communal settlement, were usually called herads (*héraðr*) throughout the North, but there were various exceptions which probably had their origin in changed administrative conditions which seemed to call for a new terminology. In Denmark, Iceland, and southern Sweden, for instance, the herad was commonly found; but in the north of Sweden the corresponding division was known as a hundred (*hundrað*), while groups of the hundreds were in some cases called herads. The herad was very usual in Norway also, but the names *fylki* and *fjórðungr* were applied to some of the small political units; and still other terms were employed in individual cases.[1]

Administrative Divisions

In the larger political grouping there was even less uniformity. In some parts of Norway, the fylki, instead of being identical with the herad, was composed of a

[1] Tunberg, Sven, *Studier rörande Skandinaviens äldsta politiska Indelning, passim;* Hildebrand, *Svenska Folket under Hedna Tiden,* 216–220; Bugge, *Norges Historie,* vol. I, pt. II, 232

number of the last-named units; in others, the larger divisions were known as "lands" or "rikes"—dominions,—as Haalogaland and Raumarike. In Denmark and Sweden the name "land" was applied to some of the provinces, but not to others, though all of the provinces appear to have been made up of groups of herads, or their equivalents. Much obscurity, however, surrounds the subject of local administration in continental Scandinavia, for there are many serious gaps in the existing evidence; and it seems impossible to form a clear conception of the administrative machinery as a whole.

Fortunately, this is not true with reference to Iceland, for which data are fairly adequate. And from our knowledge of local administration there it seems possible to gain a somewhat more satisfactory idea of the corresponding governmental units on the continent; for it appears likely that Iceland followed the political machinery of the mother land, except insofar as it interfered with the settlers' ideas of personal liberty and the needs of a commonwealth, as opposed to a kingdom.

In Iceland, the most important local unit was the godord (*goðorð*), which was politico-religious in character. The settlers were grouped into a large number of such divisions, each a little republic in itself, until the Althing was established and the Commonwealth formed, when the godords were reduced to thirty-nine and the island divided into four quarters, each containing nine godords, except the North Quarter, which, because of conditions peculiar to the region, was given twelve. For certain purposes of administration, three godords were counted as a political unit. Such a group was called a thriding (*þriðjungr*), and bore a close relationship to the "riding" of northern England.[2]

[2] Conybeare, *Place of Iceland in the History of European Institutions*, 46.

In early times, each of the many independent divisions of Scandinavia had at its head a chieftain who performed the triple function of priest, military commander, and political leader. Such men were doubtless for a very long period the only public officials of the North. The hersar, mentioned in Chapter III, appear to have been of this class. The jarls and early "kings" probably did not originate until after the movement towards centralization had been well launched, and subordinate offices created. But we are wholly lacking in information with reference to some of these officials, and must simply assume their existence; and our knowledge regarding others is quite inadequate. The same holds true of the administrative officials of the Viking Age. It is possible, however, to form a fairly definite idea of three of the most important ones of this later period—the godi (*goði*), the lawman, and the king.

Administrative Officials

The name "godi," applied to the chieftain-priest at the head of the godord, appears to have been peculiar to Iceland. But the official was obviously the historical descendant of the early chieftains mentioned in the preceding paragraph; and there is no doubt that on the continent, contemporary with the godi, there were politico-religious officials whose functions were, as a whole, similar to those of the former. The chieftain-priests of the continent are, however, very shadowy figures, while, because of the more abundant data, the godi may be seen in detail. The latter must, therefore, be looked upon as representative, in a broad way, of the whole class of Scandinavian politico-religious officials.[3]

The Godi

[3] Philpotts, "Temple-Administration and Chieftainship in pre-Christian Norway and Iceland," in *Saga Book*, VIII, 264–285.

At the time of the settlement of Iceland, all of the chieftains or leaders of note, imitating the system at home on the continent, built temples upon their own land, close beside their dwellings; and these religious edifices formed nuclei around which the future communities grew. Since he was the priest of the temple, the chieftain was called the "godi." But besides his religious functions, which will be considered in a later chapter, this Icelandic priest performed civil duties extending to every branch of the public service, from the care of the poor in his district to legislation for the whole commonwealth. In the capacity of port or customs official, he it was who first went aboard the ships touching his district. He might fix the price of all wares brought by these vessels, and had the first right to purchase the imports. He might forbid people who were strangers to the land coming in touch with the inhabitants of his district, and was even authorized to prohibit their landing at all. But he also performed some of the duties of the present-day consul in his relation to foreigners, for they were under his special protection and he was responsible for their welfare. It was his duty to arrange for their accommodation and entertainment at a reasonable price, to be fixed by himself. Should a foreigner die in Iceland as a result of violence, the godi in whose district he met his death was expected to bring the murderer to justice and to see that the dead man's property was distributed among his rightful heirs. As far as possible, also, he guarded the interests of Icelanders of his district in their foreign relations.[4]

As supreme magistrate of his district, the godi "purged the land of all crime" and presided at the local assembly.

[4] *Ibid.;* Conybeare, *Place of Iceland in the History of European Institutions,* 31–32

To the men of his godord he owed protection in their lawsuits, and, in return for such services, he could summon them to accompany him on his journeys through his godord, and could demand that they entertain him during such official visits. At all times he could require that at least one ninth of them attend him at the Althing.[5]

The chief source of income of this politico-religious official was the temple dues; but he also received fines and fees of various sorts in connection with his civil functions.[6] His total remuneration was, however, probably small, and this fact may account to a considerable extent for a questionable practice which existed among the godis. At times, in an unfair manner, the godi induced freed men and other persons of low birth and little influence, who happened to possess property, to bequeath him all of their worldly wealth in return for support and protection—presumably of a special nature—in their lawsuits as long as they lived. Such a relation had something of the feudal bond and was humiliating to the "client." Obviously, it added to the power as well as to the wealth of the godi.[7]

Yet in spite of the great power exercised by this official, there is little reason to believe that he was often guilty of oppression or extortion. His good behavior was virtually guaranteed by the fact that his jurisdiction was personal—not territorial—and voluntary; it extended only over such persons as chose to place themselves under his protection. Though doubtless most men in the godi's community were his thingmen and his templemen, there was absolutely nothing to prevent them

[5] Conybeare, *Place of Iceland in the History of European Institutions*, 31–32.

[6] *Ibid.*, 33.

[7] This arrangement was known as "*arfsál*", Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary.

from attaching themselves to a neighboring chieftain-priest and worshipping at his temple. The fact of such right of choice would be established—if evidence were wanting—by the custom which existed at the Althing of requiring that each man state to which godord he belonged and be recognized by his own godi. In other words, the political organization of Iceland originated in the temple system, and not in land tenure or territorial jurisdiction; and, in view of the nature of the island's early settlement, it is likely that the religious side of the godi's relationship with his people played a more important part here than upon the continent. It is probable also that his functions as keeper of the temple became of much greater comparative importance after the centralization of Iceland, for this event resulted in a gradual reduction of the local civil power of the godi, as well as of the number of godis having civil offices of any sort. There was compensation, however, for the ones who survived, in the fact that they became the leaders in the new commonwealth.[8]

The Lawman

Every province of ancient Scandinavia probably had its lawman[9] (*laghmann, lögmaðr lögsögumaðr*), though the functions of this official varied somewhat in the different countries, and also changed in connection with the general political evolution. But everywhere the lawmen appear to have been the special guardians and repositories of the law, and usually the presidents of the legislative bodies and the law courts as well. On the continent, they exercised

[8] Conybeare, *Place of Iceland in the History of European Institutions*, 27, 31.

[9] Maurer found no proof of the existence of this office in Denmark, but thought it not improbable that it existed there, as in the other Northern lands. "Das angebliche Vorkommen des Gesetzsprecheramtes in Denmark," in *Sitzungsberichte der Königl. Bayer. Akad. der Wissenschaften*, 363–399.

more influence than in the western islands, for here they were also the first commoners within their provinces, and were the spokesmen of the people and the guardians of their rights against the kings and the courts at the popular assemblies and elsewhere where their aid was needed. In Sweden they played an unusually important part in the last-named capacities, for here they were elected for life by the peasants, though in some cases from families long holding the office. Before the time of Harold Hairfair, the lawmen of Norway probably secured their offices in a similar manner, but after the land was centralized the king himself assumed the power of nomination, which action placed these law officers to a great degree under royal control. Broadly speaking, the lawmen of the continent were peers in their relation to the national government; but the lawman of the province of Upland, in Sweden, had a superior ranking and was a semi-national—as well as a provincial—official; for it was his function to swear the new king into office at the meeting of the thing in his province at Mora.[10]

The lawman of Iceland was the only officer of the Icelandic commonwealth and was elected by the whole body of the Althing, for a term of three years, the election taking place upon the first Friday of the meeting, before the cases to be tried were taken up. But the vote must be unanimous. If it failed in this regard, the election must be made by a single quarter, lots being cast to decide which quarter should make the choice.[11] The chief qualification for the office was a thorough knowledge of the law. In compensation for his services, the lawman received an annual salary of two hundred ells of wadmal

[10] Schwerin, "Gesetzsprecher," in Hoops, *Reallexikon;* Conybeare, *Place of Iceland in the History of European Institutions,* 35; Chadwick, "Ancient Teutonic Priesthood," in *Folklore,* XI, 282.

[11] Du Chaillu, *Viking Age,* I, 534.

and one-half of the fines imposed by the courts.[12] He might also be godi at home, and perhaps often was, which was an additional source of revenue. But his duties at the Althing were such as to require that he have a representative of his godiship to act for him here.[13]

During the heathen period the lawmen throughout the North were of special importance as repositories of the law, for it was preserved only in their memories, and transmitted orally from generation to generation. In order that the people might be familiar with the law, its guardians must repeat it aloud at the thing meetings. The Icelandic requirement was that the lawman recite aloud the laws of the land in the presence of the majority of those present at the Althing, going through the whole of it during the three years' term. Certain parts must be recited at every meeting of the general assembly, as, for example, those pertaining to the regulation of the session.[14] For the purpose of aiding the memory, some of the laws were expressed in rhyme.

As presiding officer of the legislative committee of the Althing, the lawman was required also to answer every one who asked him what the law was in a given instance, but he was in no wise "bound to mix himself further in the cases of the litigants."[15] That is, he was only the living voice of the law; he rendered no judgments; neither had he authority to enforce decisions or punish offenders. He was permitted, however,—like the Roman praetors—to promulgate special edicts; but these were binding only during the period of his incumbency. Yet, if a lawman was reëlected repeatedly—as happened twice in Iceland—these edicts, by customary usage, be-

12 *Origines Islandicae*, I, 348.
13 Du Chaillu, *Viking Age*, I, 535.
14 *Grágás*, III, 207–209.
15 *Origines Islandicae*, I, 345.

came as binding as the regularly enacted laws, and were, consequently, recorded in the law books when the art of writing was introduced.[16]

Relation Between the Ancient Lawman and the Present "Speaker" of the House

Though "lawmen" of one sort or another existed in Scandinavia until the late Middle Ages, the officers of this name were far less important than their predecessors of the Viking Age; for the lawmen lost power in proportion as the kings gained it. This was true even in Sweden, where the lawmen were particularly strong. And Iceland suffered as much as the continent in this regard, through the fall of the commonwealth and the extension of Norwegian control over the island. Nevertheless, in many countries which have been influenced, directly or indirectly, by Scandinavian institutions, officers having some of the functions of the ancient "sayers of the law" may be found. The most notable instances of these are the "speakers" of the House of Commons of England and of the House of Representatives of the United States.

Kings

Though after the ninth century the kings were the chief executive officers of continental Scandinavia, and though their power increased steadily at the expense of the lawmen, their positions were far different from those of Northern sovereigns of later times. The royal administrators of the Scandinavian lands were in many ways merely the first among equals —though in some parts they exercised more influence than in others—and were bound in most regards by the same laws as the humblest of their subjects.[17] Though

[16] Conybeare, *Place of Iceland in the History of European Institutions*, 43.

[17] Adam of Bremen, 192, No man, the old Norwegian law stated, shall

respected, they were not reverenced; not till centuries after the close of the Viking Age was their office tainted by the "divine right" theory, which fostered autocracy and tyranny.

In Norway, the sovereign usually held his position by right of inheritance, and, consequently, he was probably more powerful here than elsewhere in the North; but in the absence of suitable heirs, or—after the introduction of Christianity—if the king or his heirs lapsed into paganism, some properly qualified member of the royal family must be chosen as king by a select body of churchmen and laymen.[18] In Denmark and Sweden during the Middle Ages, the sovereigns were usually elected. In the former land, the three leading towns of the time—Viborg, Ringsted, and Lund—appear to have taken the initiative in the election, and the remainder of the country perhaps did little more than acquiesce in their choice. Among the Swedes, however, where democratic control survived longest, the choice seems to have been much more directly representative of the nation. The popular assembly—called the Morathing—which met near the present Uppsala, in the province of Upland, took the initiative and made the choice. This parliament was probably representative of much of the Sweden of the period; but after being duly elected and proclaimed by the lawman of the province to be the legal and rightful sovereign, the new king was required to travel throughout the provinces and submit himself to the consideration of each of the local assemblies. The order of the progress was fixed by law, and it was customary for the new ruler to be accompanied from one province to another by a train

commit an assault on another, be he king or churl. Conybeare, *Place of Iceland in the History of European Institutions*, 18.

[18] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 3.

of people from the last political unit visited. After each provincial thing had satisfied itself of the legality of the candidate's claim, the king was required to swear "to strengthen the laws and to preserve peace," after which the presiding lawman proclaimed him to be the rightful ruler, and the populace swore allegiance to him.[19] Thus he was inaugurated into his royal office.

Something has been said in other connections regarding the relations between the Scandinavian kings of the Viking Age and their people.[20] Therefore, it will suffice simply to add that, until some time after the introduction of Christianity, the sovereign was to the nation as a whole what the chieftain or early local king was to a small subdivision of the land—its chief priest, political administrator, and military leader.

The Thing

In the preceding pages frequent mention has been made of the thing, or political assembly; and this has been natural and inevitable, for this body played an exceedingly important part in the life of the Northmen. Even the sovereigns themselves were largely at the mercy of the provincial and national things. For, though, socially, the ancient Northland was aristocratic, it was, on the whole, politically democratic. The people governed themselves through the medium of the thing, an institution which their ancestors probably brought into Scandinavia with them in the remote, prehistoric past. At first, the only assemblies were those in which the small, primitive, independent communities gathered; but with the movement towards political centralization, things representing increasingly larger territorial areas came into existence, without, however, elimi-

[19] Schwerin, "Königswahl," in Hoops, *Real'exikon;* Adam of Bremen, 192.
[20] See pp. 54–56.

nating the smaller assembles of earlier origin, which survived as local administrative organizations.[21]

The Thing Place

These political assemblies were always held in the open air, in a valley or plain having a knoll or hill upon its surface, on which the presiding officer could stand, and from which announcements and speeches could be made to the assembled people. This gathering place was called the *thingvöll*, or parliament-field; and in many geographical names of the North the word "thing" still appears, not only in Scandinavia proper but also in the British Isles, particularly in the northern part.[22] In the Isle of Man, where Scandinavian influence was very strong in the early Middle Ages, the local parliament still gathers under the open sky in a little valley and proclaims the new laws of the island from Tynwald Hill. In Iceland the general assembly of the republic was held at Thingvellir. During the last part of the Viking period there were in Norway two notable places where the parliaments gathered—Gulöe, a tiny island belonging to the diocese of Bergen, and the peninsula of Frosta in the vicinity of Trondhjem. The former was the place of assembly for the law-makers

[21] Iceland is an example of the multiplication of these popular assemblies. At the time the Althing was established the island was divided into quarters, which led to a reduction of the number of the godords, but the old local things were held in those that survived, as formerly; and, in addition, each quarter had its quarter meetings. The most important of these latter were evidently the spring assembly, called the *Várðing*, which lasted from four days to a week, and the autumn, or *Hausðing*, which convened two weeks after the adjournment of the Althing and sat for two days, its main purpose being to notify the people of the quarter of the enactments of the national assembly. Conybeare, *Place of Iceland in the History of European Institutions*, 45; Hildebrand, *Lifvet på Island under Sagatiden*, 288.

[22] In the Shetland Islands there is Tingwall; in east Scotland, Dingwall; near Dumfries, Tynwald; and in Yorkshire and Cheshire there are places called Thingwall.

of southern Norway, and the latter, for those residing farther north. The two parliaments were long contemporaneous, but the Gulöething appears to have been in existence at least as early as the tenth century, and originated before the Frostathing. The two greatest law codes of ancient Norway bear the names of these legislative assemblies.[23] In very early times the chief place for the thing meeting of Denmark was Isöre, upon the coast of the island of Sjaelland; and Uppsala was the special gathering place for the Swedes; but with the passage of time other regions became more or less formidable political rivals.[24]

Living Conditions at the Thingstead

The general political assemblies usually took place during the summer, and lasted for two or more weeks. Religious festivals were often held in connection with them; and here also unusual commercial opportunities presented themselves, and chances for forming desirable marriage alliances; friend could again meet friend; and all could enjoy the intellectual and athletic exercises which pleasantly filled the time between sessions. Therefore, this gathering was the great social event of the year, and people flocked to it in large numbers. Law and custom regulated living conditions at the thingstead. In the absence of inns, all comers were forced to bring their own food, as well as other supplies. In Norway the law required that men coming to the assembly at Gulöe bring at least meal and butter, in the way of food; and also a little money, to contribute to a general fund for the purpose of buying other food upon the thingvöll.[25] Sim-

[23] *Islandica*, IV, 17; Maurer, Konrad, *Entstehungszeit der älteren Gulathingslög;* Maurer, *Entstehungszeit der älteren Frostuthingslög.*

[24] Petersen, *Gammel-Nordiske Geografi*, 13–16.

[25] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 5.

ilar arrangements perhaps existed throughout most of the North. Feed for the horses had in some cases to be carried along also, upon pack animals in the remoter parts; but for the general thing meeting this was not as a rule necessary, since the gathering did not take place until the grass was high enough for grazing, and in the selection of a site for the assembly, attention was always paid to the needs of the livestock. Meadows and streams, to be used in common, were found close beside the meeting place of every parliament. And whenever possible there was a wood which furnished fuel.

Residences at the Thing

For the purpose of shelter, various sorts of structures were erected, generally of a purely temporary nature, as tents of skin, wool, or linen; but upon the continent chieftains probably built large halls, from timber near at hand, for housing themselves and their followers; and in Iceland and the other islands to the west they erected permanent structures, usually of stone or turf; but these western thing dwellings, called booths, appear to have stood open to the sky for the most of the year, and were covered only during the two weeks or so of occupancy, with a roofing of tent material.[26] These temporary residences were often quite large and were fitted up like permanent dwelling houses, the larger ones being at times divided into two or more apartments and furnished with platforms and beds and seats of honor, such as were found in the banqueting halls at home. As there was considerable visiting and entertaining back and forth between booths, decorative hangings for the walls were carried along and displayed upon festive occasions.

In addition to the booths of those who came primarily to attend the thing meeting, and their families, there

[26] Hildebrand, *Lifvet på Island under Sagatiden*, 289.

were upon the thing-field the quarters of various other classes of people who, by one means or another, took advantage of the large gathering for commercial gain. These included merchants, often from foreign lands; craftsmen of various sorts; sellers of ale and other drinks; people, such as musicians and jugglers, whose special business it was to afford amusement, and thus turn a penny; and also witches and soothsayers who dabbled in the occult and lifted aside the veil hiding the future for the pleasure or profit of those who had the necessary fee. And, finally, hanging on as best they could, was the inevitable troop of beggars, who, in defiance of the efforts in some parts of the North to eliminate them by legislation from the thing meetings, were always in evidence.[27]

Merchants, Hand-Workers and Hangers-on

Though all freemen coming under the jurisdiction of a certain thing were, in general, privileged to attend its meetings, the law as to who must attend varied with time and place as well as with the character of the thing. In Norway all bóendr within a herad were required to attend the ordinary herad thing on pain of fine, unless their farms were so small that they worked them alone, and, hence, could not easily leave them. These humble farmers—called *einvirki,* or sole workers—were, however, required to be present at assemblies of special importance, such as the king's thing—a gathering called by the king, the court held in consequence of murder in the community, and the assemblies which took place for the purpose of equalizing taxes and of determining whether every man had the weapons prescribed by law.[28] For the larger and more

Required Attendance

[27] "Bóð," in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary.
[28] *Norges Gamle Love,* I, 55–56.

general meetings, such as Gulöething, which met once a year, the regulations were somewhat different. A specific number of men must go from each fylcki or subdivision making up the thing-district, the number evidently varying with the population. But the law in force in southern Norway during one period also provided that a definite number of the king's laensmen, or vassals, remain behind to protect the homes of the bóendr from thieves and robbers. Those who were to go to Gulöe for the political assembly were apparently selected at the fylki thing; and failure of any man to appear at the general assembly before proceedings began made him liable to a fine of three aurar. If all of the delegates of a fylki remained away, the political unit as a whole was liable for the payment of a fine of forty marks, which was divided between the thingmen who did their duty and the king.[29] In Iceland, though all freemen had a right to take part in the Althing, only those possessing a certain amount of property were required to attend its meetings; but in special cases by paying a fine such men could be released from this duty.[30]

Summons to the Thing

The popular assemblies, local and general, were summoned in various ways. Almost everywhere throughout the North any freeman who wished a question settled or who had received an injury for which he demanded redress might call a meeting of the local thing. The method used for this private summons was similar to that employed by the king when gathering his hosts for battle. The token was an ax or an arrow which was carried by swift messengers throughout the thing district.[31] After

[29] *Ibid.*, 4–6.

[30] Hildebrand, *Lifvet på Island under Sagatiden*, 287.

[31] In some parts of Iceland in recent times a small wooden ax was still

the introduction of Christianity a cross was substituted in some cases. "Every man shall carry the summons and not drop it," says one of the old Norwegian laws. "If a man drops the summons, he is liable to a fine of three aurar. On reaching a house, the messenger must cut three notches upon the door post or the door and place the token above the lintel; and the owner of the house must in turn carry it on to the next neighbor. Usually, in the case of a local assembly, the meeting was held five days after the summons was issued.[32] No special notice was sent out for the regular thing meetings, for they were held at definite times.

The Thing Peace

In order to guard against private warfare, which was likely to arise in connection with an assemblage like the thing meeting, and cause a delay of the business of the session, the presiding officer at the first meeting solemnly consecrated the gathering and proclaimed the boundaries of the thing-stead, within which even the outlaw was safe. And any man who broke the peace thus established was himself liable to outlawry. In recognition of the formal establishment of peace, every man present must lay down his weapons, and he might not arm himself again until after the assembly had dissolved.[33] Also, in order further to guard against delay in the business of the session, in Iceland it was against the law for the thingmen to be "one night or longer" outside of the boundaries proclaimed for the thing.[34]

The time at which the day's session was to begin was

sent from farm to farm to summon the people to one of the local thing meetings. "Boð," in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary.

[32] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 55–56.

[33] Conybeare, *Place of Iceland in the History of European Institutions*, 52–53.

[34] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 354.

determined by some natural means, perhaps generally stipulated by law. *Grágás,* the Icelandic code, for instance, required that the men of the Althing should assemble not later than when the sun could first be seen from a position upon the Hill of Laws shining on a certain cleft in the hills at the west.[35] The lawman, who was chief officer of the parliament, watched for this sign and gave the signal for the gathering by ringing a bell. Then all men entitled to have a part in the deliberations went to the place of session, the lawman leading, and after him the godis and other officials.[36]

Opening of the Althing

In continental Scandinavia, the kings presided at the general thing meetings; in Iceland, though the lawman was the only national officer, the godi of the district in which the Althing was held served as chairman of the assembly. Since we possess more information with reference to the session of the Althing than with reference to the governmental machinery of any other part of the North, the work of the Althing will here be described in some detail, and may be regarded, in a broad sense, as typical of the large political assemblies of the whole of Scandinavia. Though its sessions were open to all freemen who chose to attend, the work of the Althing was largely in the hands of the thirty-nine local godis, who survived after the unification of the island, and men nominated by them. The matters with which they were primarily concerned were legislation of a general nature and the larger judicial questions, such as serious disputes, quarrels between individuals belonging to different godords, and cases appealed from local courts.[37]

The Session of the Althing

[35] *Ibid.*, vol. III, 44. [36] *Ibid.*

[37] Bryce, "Primitive Iceland," in *Studies in History and Jurisprudence,* I, 325.

Lots were cast to determine the order in which business was to be taken up by the assembly as a whole;[38] but the bulk of the work was done, as to-day, by committees, and often in separate courts. Legislative matters were in the hands of the *Lögrétta,* which sat upon the Hill of Laws. The nucleus and most important part of this committee was the thirty-nine godis already mentioned, and nine other men nominated by them and entitled to work and vote with them. This inner committee of forty-eight met in a place called also the Lögrétta, on the Hill of Laws, and had seats on the middle bench of a group of three benches arranged concentrically around an open space. On each of the other benches sat forty-eight men also, who served as counselors for the middle bench, each godi or nominee consulting the two nearest, in front of and behind him. This assembly of one hundred and forty-four men was the legislature of Iceland; it discussed all matters of general interest and made all changes in the law. But questions of minor importance could be decided even in the absence of the majority, including members from the middle bench; for the lawman, who presided over the Lögrétta, could take men from the outer or inner benches to fill vacancies caused by the absence of the godis or their nominees. For any sort of action, however, there must be forty-eight men present.[39] When any measure had the support of a majority from the middle bench, the whole Lögrétta assented to it and the new law was proclaimed to the entire gathering of thingmen by the lawman from his position upon the Hill of Laws.[40]

[38] *Grágás,* III, 98.

[39] Du Chaillu, *Viking Age,* I. 538.

[40] Bryce, "Primitive Iceland," in *Studies in History and Jurisprudence,* I, 327.

The Althing was a judicial as well as a legislative assembly. The business done by its courts was perhaps more important than the legislative enactments of the Lögrétta. In the early days of the commonwealth, the judicial power of the nation was vested in four courts, one for each quarter into which the land was divided; but there is some uncertainty regarding the number and exact personnel of these judicial bodies.[41] It is clear, however, that, as in the case of the modern jury, the decision must be unanimous.[42] As time passed, another court, known as the Fifth Court, was instituted, for the purpose of bringing about a much-needed reform in the administration of justice. The evil that it was meant to remedy was due to the fact that the Icelanders had become so reverent of legal forms and technicalities that they permitted these to obscure the spirit of justice; the slightest flaw was sufficient to quash the most important case. This state of affairs is especially surprising in view of the fact that the laws were transmitted orally from mind to mind, and not preserved by means of written records. The defeat of justice as a result of quibbling caused much dissatisfaction, and inclined men who failed to get justice in the courts to "seek their rights by point and edge."[43] The Fifth Court was intended by Njal, its founder, to be a sort of court of equity and appeals, having special jurisdiction over all cases which could not be settled elsewhere. It was made up of men from each quarter, and, consequently, had a more national character than the quarter courts; and it also differed from these in that the judges composing it were

The Courts of the Althing

[41] *Ibid.*, 325.
[42] *Ibid.*
[43] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 366.

bound by a more stringent oath. The decision, however, rested with the majority.[44] Yet, due to the fact that the government of the land was long in the hands of a powerful oligarchy, the Fifth Court was not so successful in harmonizing differences as Njal had hoped that it would be.[45]

The Vápnatak

When the cases had all been tried, the necessary legislation passed, and the required parts of the old laws recited by the lawman, the session of the Althing ended for the year. Its termination was signalized by the *vápnatak*—the resumption by the thingmen of the weapons which they had laid aside at the opening of the assembly. They now shook these and declared affairs settled, thus dissolving courts and legislature.[46]

Absence of Executive Power in the Icelandic Commonwealth

On its judicial and legislative sides the Icelandic commonwealth was perhaps a fairly close parallel to the Scandinavian kingdoms. But on the continent the national laws were executed by the king and his subordinates, while Iceland was without a national executive. The Althing had no power to enforce the laws which it passed, and the functions of the Icelandic lawman—the only national official—were limited to the session of this annual assembly.[47] Except for the few weeks in the summer when the Althing was in session, the commonwealth might be said not to have existed; during the remainder of the year the population was virtually divided, as in the days before the Althing,

[44] Conybeare, *Place of Iceland in the History of European Institutions*, 57.

[45] *Ibid.*

[46] Du Chaillu, *Viking Age*, I, 534.

[47] "Iceland is unique as the example of a community which had a great deal of law and no central executive, a great many Courts and no authority

into tiny, independent republics. But in spite of the lack of central power to enforce the law, it is very probable that the decisons of the courts were usually enforced in one way or another. Public opinion was a very powerful factor in backing up the law. Furthermore, if the defendant resisted the decision, he became an outlaw, a fact which soon rid the community of an undesirable citizen or forced a tardy compliance with the demands of the court.

to carry out their judgments." Bryce, "Primitive Iceland," in *Studies in History and Jurisprudence*, I, 334.

CHAPTER XVII

SYSTEM OF JUSTICE

Perilous is the home-verdict, unless one gets a good one.
Song of Victory.

General Character of the Judicial System

Though customary law varied somewhat in the different sections of Scandinavia, there was a remarkable uniformity in the judicial system of the North as a whole, due to the common origin and consequent unity of character of the inhabitants. A real spirit of justice characterized law and custom. In Iceland, for instance, the law carefully distinguished between *viljaverk,* a deed committed with evil intent, and *vádaverk,* the accidental harming of others.[1] Most legal systems also differentiated between the innocent abettor and the criminal himself.[2] Young children were not answerable for their misdeeds, but their fathers were responsible for them. The age at which children were themselves liable to punishment before the law varied in different parts of Scandinavia. Under the Frostathing's law, which for a long period was in force in northern Norway, they attained to responsibility in some regards at eight years; under the legal system of the Gulöething, which applied farther south, they were not personally answerable before twelve.[3] Though the age limit was rather low, as compared with that in most Christian

[1] Merker, Paul, *Das Strafrecht der Altisländischen Grágás,* 13.
[2] Brandt, Fr., "Nordmaendenes Gamle Strafferet," in *Historisk Tidsskrift,* I, 57.
[3] *Ibid.,* 43.

lands of the present day, it should be remembered that in almost all ways children were then looked upon as adults at an earlier age than is now true; hence, they were better qualified for responsibility, and it was more just to hold them liable before the law than it would be to hold children of the same age now. Slaves also were not answerable; the burdens of their misdeeds were borne by their masters; but this was perhaps due rather to the fact that they occupied such an humble place in society than to any feeling that it would be unjust to punish them for their voluntary crimes.[4]

Murder and Manslaughter

In the classification of acts as crimes and misdemeanors and in the comparative degree of abhorrence displayed towards offenders of various kinds, the Scandinavian clearly showed his racial character and temperament. The distinction made by the law between murder and manslaughter is an illustration. If a man killed another under cover of darkness, even for revenge, or killed him secretly and concealed his body, he was guilty of murder; but if he slayed him publicly, or if he promptly made known the fact of a secret murder, the act was only manslaughter.[5] Furthermore, though a master was at liberty to put his slave to death, if he failed to make public his deed, he was liable to punishment for murder.[6] Such a distinction was obviously based upon "that innate hatred of all dishonest, underhand, and lying proceedings, in that love of open, straightforward dealing, which was the most marked characteristic of the Scandinavian race. 'Even in the killing of a foe,' as Mr. Dasent well expresses it, 'there was an open, gentlemanlike way of doing it, to fail

[4] *Ibid.*, 47.
[5] Merker, *Das Strafrecht*, 68.
[6] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 160.

in which was shocking to the free and outspoken spirit of the age.' ''[7]

This same spirit is shown in the attitude towards the thief. The man who secretly took the possessions of another was more despised than the one who killed openly in a quarrel.

Stealing and Robbery

According to the value of the property involved, theft was classified in some parts of the North into what would now correspond to petty and grand larceny. In Iceland, the lesser offense involved all property below the value of one half ounce of silver, or three ells of wadmal, and of at least the value of one pfennig. The greater offense involved goods exceeding the value of one half ounce of silver.[8] Similarly, there were two classes of robbery, recognized at least in Western Scandinavia: "hand-robbery" (*handrán*), snatching the property of another out of his hand or from his back; and "red-robbery" (*rauðarán*), an aggravated kind of plundering or ruthless robbery, as in the case when the owner did not actually have hold of his goods but was, nevertheless, well known to be the owner.[9]

Arson

Arson was another crime recognized by the law and liable to severe punishment. It is interesting to note that a man was likewise responsible before some of the old Northern laws for the damage which a fire started by himself in all innocence might do.[10]

Especially is the Scandinavian temperament reflected in the large number of ancient laws for the punishment

[7] Conybeare, *The Place of Iceland in the History of European Institutions*, 79.

[8] Merker, *Das Strafrecht*, 75.

[9] *Ibid.*, 81.

[10] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 46–47.

of slander and libel, and all other words and acts which might wound the deep feeling of personal dignity characterizing the people of the North. And the degree of punishment was determined by the amount of indignity suffered by the person against whom the insult was directed. Thus, a person who forcibly removed the hat of another was liable to a three-mark fine; but if the hat was fastened on by means of a strap or band, and, consequently, a struggle was necessary to remove it, the penalty might be banishment.[11] Other offenses of a like nature which were liable to severe punishment included the cutting off of the tail of another's horse, or frightening the horse so that his rider was unseated, knocking him down—even though he fell upon his knees, throwing water or food upon him, or seizing the beard, mustache, or hair of another "with hostile hand."[12]

Slander, Libel, etc.

A variety of insult which quarrelsome Northmen delighted to employ was in the form of calling names or making libellous verses or caricatures. Hence, we find in the old law codes lists of forbidden names. In Gotland any one calling a man a thief, robber, murderer, or "murder-burner" was liable to punishment, if the accusation was false; and, in the same way a woman might secure the punishment of any one calling her a thief, murderer, poisoner, adulterer, or "murder-burner."[13] In Norway it was unlawful under heavy penalty to call a man a woman, a mare, or a bitch, for these epithets detracted from his manly dignity.[14] Libellous verses composed against another were known as *níð*. Such verses, if recited aloud, were called tongue-nid (*tungeníð*),

[11] Merker, *Das Strafrecht*, 92.
[12] Merker, *Das Strafrecht*, 91–92; *Guta-Lagh*, 14.
[13] *Guta-Lagh*, 77.
[14] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 57.

and if cut in runes or Latin letters upon a staff or post and put in a public place, were known as woodnid (*tréníð*). In Iceland, the truth of the slanderous statements was no defense before the law; [15] and even to make complimentary verses about another might be punished if their object so desired, if they exceeded four strophes in length.[16] So sensitive were the Northmen and so keen their sense of personal and family dignity and honor that even the dead could not be slandered with impunity.[17] Caricatures of an insulting nature, as the representation of a person in an undignified or shameful position also came under the nid class of slander.[18]

On the whole, as the above indicates, the things looked upon by the ancient Scandinavian laws as crimes and misdemeanors were very similar to those so regarded at present. The chief differences are perhaps to be found in the greater degree of severity shown an offender against the dignity or honor of another, and the failure during heathen times to place sex immorality very fully under the ban of the law.[19]

Means of Redressing Wrong

In the ancient North offenders rarely escaped some sort of punishment; for to permit an insult or a crime to pass unnoticed was looked upon as a virtual acknowledgment that the injured party was inferior to the one who had wronged him. Every Scandinavian who had suffered injury had three means of securing redress: blood-revenge, or following up the feud; direct private settlement for

[15] Bryce, "Primitive Iceland," in *Studies in History and Jurisprudence*, I, 344.

[16] *Grágás*, IV, 182–184. This severity was largely due to the fact that at times men composed love verses of a very coarse character.

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] *Egils Saga Skallagrímssonar*, 188–189; *Origines Islandicae*, I, 180; *Grágás*, IV, 182–184.

[19] See above, pp. 21, 99–101.

money with the wrong-doer or with his family; prosecution in the courts of law.

The Feud

The feud, which is really private warfare, was the oldest method of all; it is old as humanity itself, and, because of the weakness of the state as protector of the individual and a keeper of order, was still very strong in Scandinavia during the Viking Age. During this time it was usually resorted to because the wrong-doer refused to make a money settlement, or because the injured person refused to accept one. The latter was likely to happen in the case of a particularly outrageous or cowardly crime; and when once a feud had developed between two families, the honor of those involved would not permit of any other settlement than blood-revenge. Sometimes, however, money was accepted to square matters after a battle between feudists. The wounds of those on the two sides, for instance, were set off against one another, as well as the slayings, and the side suffering the greater loss received money payment, by mutual agreement, to make the balance even.[20]

House-Burning

Usually, the acts of revenge incident to the feud consisted only of fighting in the open; but the horrible practice of surrounding a house to prevent the inmates from escaping and then firing the building was also quite common. The Icelander, Njal, and his family met their deaths in this manner.[21] Sometimes terms were offered and received after the brand had been applied to the building;[22] but it was usually considered more honorable for the owner to perish in the flames than to compromise. Women and chil-

20 *Origines Islandicae*, II, 131.
21 *Njála*, 299–309.
22 *Origines Islandicae*, I, 208; II, 23.

dren were, as a rule, given an opportunity to escape to safety before the fire was set, but it frequently happened that family loyalty led them to prefer to die in their home with the men folk.[23] Njal's wife and little grandson thus decided to be burnt with the others.[24]

Money Settlement by Private Agreement

Money settlement by private agreement was often promptly resorted to to wipe out the memory of a wrong, if strong friendship existed between the two families concerned, or if the offense was but slight. Gunnar, for instance, whose slave killed the slave of Njal, paid to the latter twelve ounces of silver by way of damages; and when a slave of Njal later killed one of Gunnar's bondmen, Njal settled by paying the same amount. When a free working man of Njal's was killed by one of the members of Gunnar's family, Gunnar, as the responsible head of the family, paid Njal one hundred in silver by way of indemnity; and when the tables were again turned, Njal did the same by his friend. In each case, the neighbor who was wronged set his own price.[25] This was called "self-doom," or "self-judgment," and was an appeal to the sense of justice of an adversary.

The Court of Neighbors, or Home Court

At times, also, quarrels were settled outside of court through the oaths of neighbors.[26] This method appears to have been rather peculiar to Iceland, however, for there, unlike in continental Scandinavia, a private individual was not at liberty to summon a public court whenever he desired one. This made the *buákviðr*,—the court of neighbors or home court,—ex-

[23] *Ibid.*, II, 423.
[24] *Njála*, 299–309.
[25] *Ibid.*, 33.
[26] *Grágás*, IV, 188–191.

ceedingly important. In the early days of the Icelandic republic the public courts were largely subsidiary; and even after the latter became quite common, they were probably resorted to primarily for criminal cases, while civil ones were disposed of by means of the *buákviðr*. This court closely resembled the early form of the English jury, which has led some scholars to believe that the latter is of Northern origin. As a rule the neighbors must be householders and must be the *nearest* neighbors to the spot where the action took place. They were summoned by the contending parties who also decided where the court was to meet. The neighbors were placed upon oath and decided the case on their own knowledge of the facts, and, hence, possessed the functions of witnesses in present-day jury trials as well as of jurors. The number of men composing the court varied from five to nine. In unimportant cases, such as those for compensation for damages, the smaller number were called; but in more serious matters, where the punishment might be outlawry, more jurors were usually held to be necessary. The decision was by majority vote, and if such a vote could not be obtained, the case might be taken to the public court when this met.[27]

Trials in Public Courts

Though in continental Scandinavia the troubles in a community were sometimes settled in an informal manner by the oaths of kinsmen or neighbors, most difficulties which were eliminated without resort to arms went through the public courts; for judicial bodies, as has been already stated, might be called at any time by persons believing themselves wronged. The law of Norway, for example, stated that if a man was wounded maliciously by

[27] Conybeare, *Place of Iceland in the History of European Institutions*, 73–77.

another, he must announce the fact to the first man he met and call a meeting of the local thing.[28] It was, furthermore, the *duty* of the members of the family most vitally concerned to call a meeting of the court in case of serious crime. Thus, in Norway, if a man was killed, his widow —or, if he had had no wife, his heirs—must "shear up the war arrow" in the presence of witnesses and send it about the community to gather the thingmen. And it was the duty of the murderer to seek the thing meeting at the approach of the summoning arrow. If the guilty one was in hiding when the bearer arrived, his relatives must notify him of the summons. If he avoided the first summons, a second one must be sent him.[29]

Hue and Cry

Since there were no public officers in those days to perform the duty of sheriff, if the offender did not appear, he might be declared an outlaw by the court, and the matter thus be settled. If, however, a serious crime was committed in the presence of witnesses, in some parts it was the duty of those observing it to raise the hue and cry and pursue the wrong-doer, a custom which crystallized into law in England.[30]

Right of Asylum

Yet the fugitive offender was not unprotected from the violence of the mob; every thing meeting and temple provided a place of refuge in the heathen time, and with the coming of Christianity, churches and monasteries took the place of the pagan houses of worship. Also, whether the criminal gave himself up or was apprehended through the hue and cry, he had safe conduct to the place where the thing met. To violate this right or the sanctity of the

[28] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 67.
[29] *Ibid.*
[30] *Njála*, 194–195.

places of asylum was always visited with very heavy punishment.[31] Criminals could, moreover, sometimes secure protection by means of a special very sacred oath of truce, of which one of the sagas gives an interesting illustration. An outlaw returned to his home community in disguise in order to watch the athletic contests and other sports. He was invited to take part in these, which led him first to exact an oath of truce from the men, after which he revealed his identity. Though many at the gathering were startled at the disclosure, no one broke the peace.[32]

The laws of some of the countries went even considerably further in the effort to maintain order and to prevent crime. In Norway, for instance, if a man was present at a quarrel and did not part the contestants or help either of them, he was liable to pay an "indemnity of laziness" to the king.[33]

Balancing Lawsuits

In Iceland, at least, quarrels were at times ended peacefully while pending in the courts by means of an interesting system of transferring and balancing lawsuits. An example of this may be found in the saga of Njal. Gunnar, Njal's friend, wounded Thorgier and Starkad in a fight, but Njal gave to Gunnar suits which he had against the wounded men, which helped nullify the cases that they had against Gunnar, and eliminated the lawsuits.[34]

The Primitive Jury

The public trials held throughout Scandinavia had much in common; great emphasis was everywhere placed upon the evidence and verdict of sworn men. The system as followed in Denmark and

[31] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 315; Du Chaillu, *Viking Age*, I, 584; Schwerin, "Asyl," in Hoops, *Reallexikon*.

[32] Du Chaillu, *Viking Age*, I, 555.

[33] *Ibid.*, 549.

[34] *Njála*, 143–144.

Sweden shows a close kinship with the early English jury.[35] The number of jurors was regularly twelve, and the decision was by majority vote. Originally the function of this body of sworn men appears to have been merely to give evidence, but later the power of rendering a verdict was added. The jurors were not chosen by the plaintiff or defendant, but by an officer of the law, usually the godi.[36] The system in Norway, on the other hand, was virtually identical with the English institution of compurgation found during the Anglo-Saxon period. Under the Norse law, a man was discharged upon the joint oath of himself and a certain number of other men, who were called oath-helpers. In the more serious cases, the oaths of twelve were necessary; for disputes or offenses of minor importance, but six, three, or even only one oath was required.[37] The jury of twelve in Iceland appears to have also been the usual number for public trials; and it was, therefore, generally known as the *tólftarkviðr,* though the term *godikviðr* was also applied, for it consisted of the district godi and eleven men summoned by him. Here, the decision was by majority vote, as in Denmark and Sweden, and the godi seems to have voted only in case of a tie, caused by the absence of members, or by their refusal to vote.[38]

Lawsuits at the Althing

The clearest and most detailed information regarding court procedure in the ancient North is that descriptive of the lawsuits at the general court of the Icelandic Althing; and this may serve to illustrate the Scandinavian trials, as a whole; for the variations found in different parts of the North

[35] Lehmann, K., "Geschworene," in Hoops, *Reallexikon.*

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] Conybeare, *Place of Iceland in the History of European Institutions,* 75.

were, after all, concerned largely with details, and everywhere the lawsuit was based upon the evidence of the community, supported by oath. Successful pleading before the Icelandic bar of justice even at this time called for considerable legal knowledge as well as shrewdness and skill in pleading. The humbler part of the population was, consequently, glad to secure the aid of the more influential and able men of the community possessed of a knowledge of the law; and these latter often conducted cases free of charge, because of the popularity and prestige to be gained thereby.

The attorney entered the first stage of the suit by summoning a number of "near neighbors to the spot" to witness that the prosecutor placed the case in his hands. Before these witnesses, also, the cause for the suit had to be presented with great accuracy and detail. The neighbors then testified that the notice was lawfully made, after which they were summoned to ride to the Althing and sit upon the inquest. And this summons was in turn validated by solemn testimony to the fact that it had been issued. Here concluded the preliminary proceedings. The suit itself could now be opened. Every step in it was sealed and legalized, as in the preliminaries, by the testimony of witnesses; and the failure to produce witnesses who could speak upon oath meant the loss of the suit.[39] In the trial proper, the oath was administered by the godi presiding over the Althing. A heavy silver ring dipped in the blood of a sacrificial ox in the heathen days filled the place now occupied by the Bible in the administration of oaths. The person to be sworn placed his hand upon the ring and invoked various gods to witness the truth of his

[39] Conybeare, *Place of Iceland in the History of European Institutions*, 86–87.

statement. For the sake of convenience, the ring was worn upon the arm of the godi during the thing meeting, but at other times it lay upon the altar of the chief temple. Those present at the administration of oaths were expected to judge whether the oath was correctly given and to watch the statements of the person being sworn. Perjury was visited by severe punishment. The accused, however, sometimes worded his oath so craftily as to keep peace with the gods while deceiving the witnesses. An example of this is Víga-Glum, who, in oaths taken in three different temples, so shrewdly chose his words as to appear to declare his innocence of a charge of murder, though he was actually confessing his guilt.[40]

After the witnesses to the inquest had taken their seats, the attorney,—or the plaintiff, if he handled the case himself—bade the defendant challenge their right to sit upon the case. If the "near neighbors" could be proved to be close kin to the plaintiff, the case was usually lost at this stage. When an unusually baffling situation rose upon one side or another,—due to such a challenge, or other cause,—the litigants consulted friends wise in the law who were present at the Althing. If the question was of a purely legal character, the lawman was appealed to. The jury of near neighbors rendered its verdict through its foreman, who stated definitely whether or not the group believed the accused guilty of the charges brought against him. An opportunity was then given to the other side to present its defense. If this was strong, the verdict of the jury might be discounted and complications arise, resulting in the delay of settlement; if weak, the verdict of the neighbors held, and nothing remained but for the judges to pronounce the penalty, which they did through one member—sometimes selected by lot—

[40] Keyser, *Nordmaendenes Religionsforfatning i Hedendommen*, 113–114.

acting as spokesman. Though once in a while the victorious plaintiff and his friends demanded that the judgment of the court—such as the payment of a fine—be enforced on the spot, under the eyes of the court, more often the enforcement of the penalty was a matter resting entirely between the two litigants.[41]

When much was at stake in the case, bribery was occasionally resorted to, and judges as well as witnesses were at times thus corrupted. Under such conditions, when feeling ran high, if precaution was not taken to declare a solemn peace over the assembly or to require an oath of truce of the litigants, these and their supporters were likely to go to court armed and wearing war tokens. As the trial proceeded, the side that appeared to be losing uttered war-cries as a threat to settle the case "by point and edge," if defeated in the courts. And in spite of the efforts of men of influence to prevent such a calamity, this bad feeling did at times culminate in a bloody battle on the thingstead.

The Ordeal

In addition to the use of witnesses and oaths, in an effort to prove his innocence, the accused might resort to the ordeal known as the judgment of the gods. This last form of test was, however, never employed so extensively or in such varied forms in Scandinavia as it was farther south; but when resorted to it was regarded very seriously. No person who was convicted by the ordeal, or god's judgment, could—at least in the early Christian time—afterward clear himself through man's judgment, the oath. The ordeal was, on the other hand, always preceded by the oath. After the christianization of the North, two well-known forms of the ordeal were introduced: the boiling

[41] *Njála, passim. Cf.* Haskins, Charles Homer, *Norman Institutions*, 196–238, for the origin of the jury system.

water test, for women; and the ordeal of red hot iron, for men.[42] But there were at least two kinds of appeal to supernatural agencies in use in the North long before Christianity was adopted; and these heathen tests were retained for centuries after the ancient gods had been abjured.[43] One of the ordeals appears to have been peculiar to Scandinavia and shows kinship to the ceremony by which blood brotherhood was sealed. A strip of turf was cut in such a manner that the middle of it might be raised to form an arch while the ends were still attached to the ground; and through this "earth necklace," as the arch was called, the accused was required to pass. If no earth fell upon him while he was doing so, he was deemed innocent.[44]

Wager of Battle: Einvígi and Hólmganga

But the wager of battle was the most common and most important form of ordeal, and might be resorted to at any time. Even after the witnesses had been selected for a regular court trial, one antagonist might challenge the other to a duel, by way of settlement, in which case this judgment of the gods superseded all other proceedings.[45] There were two forms of single combat used in deciding cases, but in both the man who was vanquished was regarded as guilty and had to suffer the punishment which the law visited upon his crime; for it was firmly believed that the gods would be with the innocent and give him strength for the fight, thus enabling him to overcome his antagonist. The simpler and, probably, older variety of duel was known as

[42] Lehmann, K., "Gottesurteile," in Hoops, *Reallexikon*.

[43] Matthias, Ernst, "Beiträge zur Erklärung der Germanischen Gottesurteile," in *Jahresbericht* des Königlichen Viktoria-Gymnasiums zu Burg für das Schuljahr 1899–1900, pp. 3–23.

[44] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 319.

[45] Keyser, *Nordmaendenes Religionsforfatning i Hedendommen*, 246.

einvígi, or single combat. There appear to have been no very fixed rules governing it; any kind of weapons could be employed, and the combatants were their own shield-bearers; but witnesses must be present if the contest was to settle the case.

The other type of duel was much more formal and serious, and also more usual in viking times. After the exchange of challenges, a definite time and place were agreed upon for the battle. Apparently, whenever possible a small island was selected as the scene of the contest, to secure natural boundaries and freedom from disturbance, whence, the name *hólmganga,* meaning "island going." Wherever a thing was held a place was set apart for such dueling. That connected with the Icelandic Althing was on an island in the Öxará River. In the absence of natural limits within which the combatants could struggle, artificial boundaries were established. In parts of Iceland, a cloak or hide five ells long was laid upon the ground and pegged down at the corners. Around this, three concentric squares were drawn one foot apart, and at the corners of the outer square hazel poles were driven into the ground. This "hazeled field," as it was called, formed the extreme limits within which the holmgang duel might take place. Each combatant was permitted three shields, and the man who was challenged had the right to strike the first blow. But if this person was incapacitated by age or other cause, he might select another to fight for him. If either man set one of his feet outside of the boundaries, he was held to have surrendered; if both feet, he was looked upon as having fled. When one of the duelists became wounded so that his blood fell upon the cloak or hide, he did not have to fight any more; but frequently the contest continued until both contestants were severely wounded, sometimes

mortally. According to the law, the one most severely wounded when the battle ended was required to suffer the penalty, which in the case of both kinds of trial by combat was fixed beforehand; while the winner celebrated his victory by sacrificing a steer or two to the gods as a thank-offering. Sometimes, however, both victor and vanquished made sacrifices.[46]

In spite of its popularity, trial by battle was outlawed in Scandinavia during the early part of the eleventh century. This was perhaps partly due to the fact that the Scandinavian countries, earlier than many more highly cultured lands, eliminated barbarous and superstitious practices from their legal systems;[47] but the degeneration of the duel, and the fact that it became an excuse for highhanded and outrageous acts was more influential in causing its downfall. It developed into a so general arbiter in the settlement of disputes and lawsuits that it came to be regarded as conferring rights of ownership where none previously existed. Men possessed of little inherent sense of justice—particularly the professional bullies who formed part of the berserker class—came to challenge others to holmgang, naming the land, houses, and even the wives of the latter as the stakes of the contest. So firmly did public opinion hold the outcome of such duels to be the just decree of the gods that nothing remained for the person challenged to do except to fight, unless he could buy himself off with a large sum of money. And public opinion further demanded that a man losing his possessions as an outcome of such a fight acquiesce in the outcome—unless he were willing to risk another duel in the hope of regaining them.

[46] *Egils Saga Skallagrímssonar*, 67 ff.; *Kormaks Saga*, chs. 9–10; *Origines Islandicae*, I, 320–321; *Flóamanna Saga*, 26–27.

[47] Lea, *Superstition and Force*, 561–563.

In time, however, common sense prevailed over superstitious tradition, and the holmgang was abolished by law in Iceland about the year 1006, as a direct result of the feud resulting in a tragic duel between Gunnlaug Snake-Tongue and the skald Hrafn.[48] Norway took similar action about six years later.[49]

The Litigation Truce

In spite of the popularity of the wager of battle as a prompt and infallible settlement of quarrels, the great majority of cases coming up for public settlement probably reached their termination through the slower and more involved trial by inquest in the law courts; for though the ancient Scandinavians loved warfare, many were even more devoted to litigation—an attachment partly explainable by their fondness for a contest, of whatever nature. In fact, in Norway, at least, the love for lawsuits interfered with ordinary peaceful pursuits to such a degree that, after the introduction of Christianity, a work-truce or peace, was provided for by law, during which no lawsuits could be conducted. This came in the late spring,[50] presumably to enable the farmers to give their whole attention to the planting of crops.

Punishments in General

The nature of the punishment provided by law depended upon the character of the offense, the rank of the offender, and the part of the land in which the wrong was committed. Usually, the bodies of law which were growing up in the different sections of the North spoke with clearness in respect to these matters; but it was impossible for the existing legislation to fit every case that came up; consequently, judges not infrequently de-

[48] *Gunnlaugs Saga Ormstungu*, ch. 11.
[49] *Grettis Saga Asmundarsonar*, ch. 21.
[50] *Norges Gamle Love*, III, 19, 93–95.

termined cases upon their individual merits. This judicial independence appears to have been most common in Sweden.[51]

Fines

The payment of fines was the mildest and most general form of punishment. It was often visited not only upon those who were convicted of thievery and robbery but also upon those guilty of maiming and killing. Its application to cases of injury against the person of another rose from an early recognition of the right of property possessed by members of a family in their kindred, as well as in houses and lands. Through the wounding or death of one of its members, the family as a unit was weakened.[52]

In fixing the punishment for wounding or maiming, most of the laws went into the greatest detail. The location of the injury was carefully considered; also its painfulness; whether bone, marrow, or intestines protruded as a result of it; and many other matters. A wound upon the back usually called for double the fine of one upon the breast; an injury leaving a scar that would make the victim "look more ugly" demanded heavier punishment than one, the traces of which could be covered with the person's hair or clothing.[53] In Norway, and also in the Scanian law which was in force in what is now southern Sweden, the indemnity for destroying a person's eye, hand, or foot was one half of the amount due if he were killed; and full value, or *manbót,* was payable if both eyes, hands, or feet were destroyed.[54] In addition to the damages due the victim, some of the laws

[51] Vicary, J. Fulford, *Saga Time,* 125.

[52] Conybeare, *The Place of Iceland in the History of European Institutions,* 72.

[53] Brandt, "Nordmaendenes Gamle Strafferet," in *Historisk Tidsskrift,* IV, 32.

[54] Seebolm, *Tribal Custom in Anglo-Saxon Law,* 292.

required that the offender pay the fees of the physician caring for the wound, and his and his patient's living expenses while the wound was healing.[55]

Insults were also often wiped out by the payment of a fine; and in this regard there was the same sort of gradation as governed the damages liable for wounds. But, generally speaking, the amount was only one third as great as for the latter offense.[56]

Wergeld

In the ancient North each rank of society had its *rétt*, or value, before the law, a sum which corresponded to wergeld in England, and must be paid to the family of the slain by the slayer or his family. The higher the slain person socially, the greater the value placed upon his life. The rétt of each class varied to some extent in the different parts of Scandinavia, as did also the classification of society, but on the whole there was considerable agreement with reference to the comparative value of each rank. The wergeld laws long in force in southern Norway will serve as a general example of all. The fine or indemnity imposed by the court for the death of a leysing or freedman was six aurar (six ounces of silver); that for his son, eight; for a bondi, twelve; for either a hauldman or an othal-born man, twenty-four aurar; and for a lendirman, twice that sum.[57] Though these were the usual amounts of damages if the crime was punished by the courts, in the case of private adjustment, occasionally as much as two or three times the legal value of the slain was paid; particularly if the families involved were friends, and it was especially desired that the friendship be preserved.[58] A woman enjoyed the

[55] Du Chaillu, *Viking Age*, I, 550.
[56] Seebohm, *Tribal Custom in Anglo-Saxon Law*, 240.
[57] *Ibid.*
[58] *Njála*, 376–377.

same rétt as her husband; and a child under fifteen years was, in Norway, valued at half the sum of an adult in the same class.[59] Such gradations, based upon social value, as have been indicated were recognized throughout the whole of the North until the rise of towns, after which a special town law developed that made the rétt of all town-dwellers equal to that of the hauld of the country at large.[60]

Originally, the wergeld was paid by the family of the murderer to the family of the slain, each member of the former making a payment to the corresponding member of the latter; and the total sum paid was the same, regardless of the number to receive it, for it was the price of the man. The payers and payees were primarily the men-folk of the two groups; for the women-folk were concerned in only a secondary manner,—the nearest kinswomen on both sides paying and receiving a certain small amount, called *kvenngjöf*—"women's gift." Except for this, a woman was never regarded as financially concerned in such settlements, unless she were sole heir. This attitude towards the dues of the women was doubtless an outgrowth of the fact that, as compared with men, very few women met death at the hands of another. By the early part of the Viking Age, however, the family solidarity had broken to such an extent in Norway and Iceland that the whole kindred was no longer concerned in the payment and receipt of wergeld, but only the direct heirs. In Denmark and Sweden, on the other hand, the old system of graded distribution long prevailed.[61]

Maiming and branding with red-hot irons were occa-

[59] Brandt, "Nordmaendenes Gamle Strafferet," in *Historisk Tidsskrift*, I, 43.

[60] Du Chaillu, *Viking Age*, I, 547.

[61] *Ibid.*, 540, *passim*. See above, pp. 25–30, *passim*.

sionally resorted to by way of punishment. For instance, according to one Norwegian code of laws, if one man bit another, his fore teeth were broken out at the thing meeting by the king's tax-gatherer. If a female slave was convicted of theft, her nose and both ears were lopped off. Hands and feet might also be chopped off as punishment for different crimes; and branding upon the cheek with red-hot iron was long a regular form of punishment.[62] Deformity and mutilation were, however, never common as penalties in Scandinavia; and, except in the case of slaves—who were not looked upon as having the rights of other human beings—they appear to have been scarcely known in the heathen period, for the ancient Northman took a pride in his physical appearance which prevented such atrocious devices from receiving general countenance. With the introduction of Christianity and the gradual development of the conception that mortification of the flesh made for godliness, such penalties became more common, but even in this later period they were never as generally resorted to in Scandinavia as they were farther south.

Maiming and Branding

Though not so common during the heathen period as later when Christianity was well established, capital punishment existed in all parts of the North during the viking period. The death penalty was inflicted in some instances for robbery, stealing, and murder;[63] and sometimes, at least in Sweden, for adultery, but perhaps only against women offenders.[64] The officers of the law dispatched the criminal in various ways. Many were offered to the gods

Capital Punishment

[62] *Norges Gamle Love*, II, 60, and *passim*.

[63] Conybeare, *Place of Iceland in the History of European Institutions*, 81.

[64] Adam of Bremen, 191.

upon the temple altars, particularly in Iceland.[65] But barbarous "lay" executions were sometimes employed, such as placing the doomed persons upon a rock out in the sea, to perish from starvation or to be drowned by the rising tide; thrusting them into a pit or into a bog or fen, to die of hunger or suffocation; shutting them up in a cave; or throwing them from the top of a high cliff. Hanging was, however, perhaps the most common form of capital punishment in the Northern lands throughout the Middle Ages.[66]

Though with the passing of the centuries of the Middle Ages, forfeiture of life for the punishment of crime became very general, in the early period the more common penalty for serious crimes was outlawry. Free men were the offenders most commonly placed beyond the pale of the law, for the unfree could not usually be outlawed, and women might be in only a few cases.[67] A sentence of outlawry generally meant banishment for a period, since for the offender to remain in his home community without the protection of the law was almost certain to end in his death sooner or later, at the hands of the persons whom he had wronged. Outlawry might be visited for a long list of offenses and crimes, such as slander, blasphemy, bribery for legal support, stealing, wounding, and murder. But there were two degrees of outlawry, determined by the nature of the wrong done,—partial, or lesser, and complete, or greater. The milder form applied only to a certain territory and for a short period, usually three years. During this time the outlaw might pay, or have paid by his family, a fine or ransom for his life. The places where

Outlawry

[65] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 322.
[66] *Ibid.*
[67] Schwerin, "Friedlosigkeit," in Hoops, *Reallexikon*, II, 98.

a lesser outlaw might live were indicated to him by the court, but relatives might not visit him more than once a month. If he kept within the stipulated area, the lesser outlaw was free from attack, but when his period of grace had expired if his ransom remained unpaid, he became a complete outlaw, unless he left the country. But if he decided to leave, he was given safe conduct to the port where he was to take ship; and no ship-owner might refuse him passage without making himself liable to a fine of three marks. After living in banishment in foreign lands for three years, the lesser outlaw might return to his home and resume his former privileges as a free man.[68]

Complete outlawry was a much more severe punishment and was inflicted, during the Middle Ages, for only the most serious of crimes. The total outlaw lost his goods and land—even though it be othal land—through confiscation,[69] and any one might take his life with impunity. No one might help him in any manner,—as by giving him food or shelter,—except his wife, who, in Norway, was permitted to supply him with food for five days.[70] Any house in which such a criminal was harbored might be torn down and burned.[71] Consequently, as long as a man of this class remained in the land he generally hid in some out-of-the-way place, often inhabited only by people who, like himself, were beyond the protection of the law.[72] But in spite of the hardships of such a life many men hazarded it, for to go into banish-

[68] Merker, *Das Strafrecht*, 46.

[69] Under some laws, the property went to the next heir; but the property of the outlaw's wife remained untouched. Brandt, "Nordmaendenes Gamle Strafferet," in *Historisk Tidsskrift*, I, 16.

[70] Brandt. "Nordmaendenes Gamle Strafferet," in *Historisk Tidsskrift*, I, 11.

[71] Merker, *Das Strafrecht*, 39.

[72] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 295.

ment abroad was looked upon by a proud-spirited man as a disgrace—a sign of cowardice.[73] Complete outlawry usually placed the offender beyond legal protection for a long period of years, or for life;[74] but there were methods by which the worst outlaw might buy himself back into public favor. For instance, in some parts he might do this by killing a number of other outlaws.[75] In Norway, however, an outlaw could regain his old standing only after serving his country through bringing the king "true war news"—that is, warning of the approach of a hostile army.[76]

[73] "Glûma," in *Izlenzkar Fornsögur*, I, 1–88.
[74] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 328.
[75] Keyser, *Private Life of the Old Northmen*, 137.
[76] Du Chaillu, *Viking Age*, I, 578.

CHAPTER XVIII

SOCIAL GATHERINGS; RECREATIONS AND AMUSEMENTS

If thou hast a friend in whom thou trustest, and thou wishest to profit by him, mingle souls with him, and exchange gifts with him and go to see him oft.

The Lesson of Loddfafni.

THE round of Scandinavian life furnished many occasions for social interchange. There were not only numerous meetings to celebrate important epochs in the life of the individual, such as wedding and funeral feasts, and banquets tendered to a person upon the eve of his departure on a long or perilous journey and to celebrate his safe return, but there were also seasonal and religious holidays on which friends and relatives temporarily abandoned their usual humdrum duties and gathered under a common roof to pass the hours in a more pleasant or more exalted manner for an interval. The largest and most important of these were the sacrificial assemblages which took place in spring, midsummer, autumn, and midwinter. The last-named holiday was the most significant from a religious standpoint; and, probably because of the great crowds which gathered to do honor to the gods, it seems also to have been the favorite occasion for social pastimes. Perhaps in this period when most of the hours in the twenty-four were shrouded in darkness and when there was the greatest leisure the Northmen's social instincts were most keen and they most appreciated their fellow men and felt greater need for their companionship. At this season it

Opportunities for Social Gatherings

was customary for the chieftains and other leading men of the community to gather their friends and followers about them for the purpose of worship and recreation; and if the host were a man of wealth, the banqueting and merry-making might last a whole fortnight.[1] Many of the social gatherings of this period of the year were, however, purely social; friend visited friend. Sometimes two or more good friends would give entertainments turn about in one another's honor.[2]

Invitations to Social Gatherings

The prospective hosts gave invitations to the regular seasonal gatherings long beforehand—sometimes months in advance. If, as was often the case, the bidding was a general one, it was usually made at an entertainment; but sometimes the invitations were given individually. In addition to the date for the social event and the length of time it would last, the host occasionally made known the important fact that he would present gifts to his guests.[3]

Preparation for the Reception of Guests

Men of wealth and prominence sometimes assembled hundreds of people at such entertainments, and the provision made for them was often very elaborate, for here was an excellent opportunity for securing the much-desired "good report" among his fellow men. And for many weeks before the guests were expected, the mother and daughters of the household worked busily with the women servants in preparation for the event. They dressed and cared for the carcasses of the animals slaughtered for the feasting; brewed ale, baked large

[1] Schönfeld, *Der Isländische Bauernhof und sein Betreib*, 117–118; Keyser, *Private Life of the Old Northmen*, 146.

[2] *Njála*, 78.

[3] Keyser, *Private Life of the Old Northmen*, 138.

supplies of bread, and prepared whatever other foods and drinks could be got in readiness beforehand; they arranged the necessary extra sleeping accommodations; polished the metal utensils and dishes to their brightest; strewed the floor of the banqueting hall with fresh straw or rushes, or spread carpets or skins over it; placed cushions, skins, and bright woven stuffs upon the benches and chairs; and decorated the walls with tapestries and other ornamental hangings.

The guests wore, or brought with them to don upon their arrival, their handsomest garments and ornaments; and the host and his family received them in their gayest and richest attire. Unexpected comers usually made their presence known by shouting when at a short distance from the house, or by rapping upon the door; but invited guests as a rule found their entertainers already at the door waiting for them, unless,—as was often the case with close friends,—the host had gone out upon the road to meet them and escort them to his home. With bared heads the men of the party exchanged greetings; all shook hands; and if the ties of friendship were strong among them there was kissing all around without distinction of age or sex.[4] The common form of salutation was "Kom heill!" which conveyed a wish for good luck, prosperity, and health. Upon departing, the phrase employed was "Far heill!" which possessed a similar meaning and closely corresponded to the English "Farewell."[5]

The seating of the visitors was a serious matter, for much attention was paid to precedence in the aristocratic ancient North. As a mark of particular honor, guests of special prominence were given the high seat of the host or hostess; and the other members of the party were

[4] *Ibid.*, 127; Baring-Gould, Sabine, *Iceland: its Scenes and Sagas*, 318.
[5] "Heilsa," in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary.

disposed of according to their social standing, those lowest in rank being placed farthest from the high seats and nearest to the outer door. Towards the close of the viking period the women usually sat upon the dais or cross bench at the end of the hall, though they were by no means limited to these seats and often sat with the men at the sides of the room at meal time as well as upon less formal occasions.[6] But the hostess and her daughters, even in families of high rank, often assisted the domestics and slaves in serving, as a special compliment to the guests. And at times married women from among the guests also waited upon the others at table.[7]

Feasting

As is still true in the Northland, much time was given to feasting; for eating and drinking together was a sign of mutual esteem and good will. As the meal was really a ceremony of friendship, the refusal of a guest to partake of the food and drink offered to him was likely to cause serious offense to the family of the host.[8] This attitude was applied particularly to the partaking of beverages, and partially accounts for the intemperance of the Northmen at their social gatherings, and for the consequent carousals. To guard against possible trouble, before the feasting began the host took the precaution to "pronounce peace over the meeting," an action which doubtless placed some restraint upon the banqueters, and contributed towards the preservation of harmony; nevertheless, the gatherings were not infrequently characterized by drunken brawls, at times ending in bloodshed and loss of life.[9]

[6] *Njála*, 20, 34; *Origines Islandicae*, II, 31; Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 459; Keyser, *Private Life of the Old Northmen*, 139.

[7] Kålund, *Familielivet på Island*, 312.

[8] Grönbech, Vilhelm, *Vor Folkeaet i Oldtiden*, III, 117–139.

[9] Keyser, *Private Life of the Old Northmen*, 140–141.

Though the women frequently drank with the men, less significance was attached to their drinking and less pains were taken to induce them to consume large quantities of the liquor than in the case of the latter; and, therefore, the women usually kept their wits about them, and when drunken quarrels arose they aided the host in his efforts to restore peace. A common device which they employed when the men became violent was to throw large cloths or pieces of clothing over the fighters, thus confusing them and preventing them from getting at each other with their weapons.[10] But reconciliation generally came after a night's sleep—perhaps only to be followed by a new quarrel when drinking was continued the next day.

Various devices were used to make the drinking more interesting and increase the consumption of beverages, presumably to strengthen and cement the ties of friendship. The banqueters not only drank toasts, or skaals, to one another and to the chief deities of the North, but engaged in drinking contests as well. Two side or opposite neighbors might drink against each other; or one person might challenge another to drink what remained in the horn of the former. This last was one method of drinking in pairs, or "by twins." To compliment a guest especially, the host occasionally offered the drinking challenge, or desired to drink by turns from a guest's horn. A form of entertainment connected with the banquet was to attempt to punish those who neglected to drink heartily by imposing a fine upon them for their deficiency.[11] *Heitstrenging,* or the making of solemn vows, also took place, a part of the ceremony of which was the drinking of a toast to Bragi, the deity who presided over minstrelsy. On this occasion the drinker rose

[10] *Ibid.,* 141–144.

[11] *Ibid.; Origines Islandicae,* II, 377.

and, placing his foot upon a stone or bench, uttered his solemn pledge, and drank off the liquor. The vows made at these times were generally concerned with some deed which the drinker swore to perform;[12] and the making of them was really a thinly veiled form of bragging—of securing the attention and admiration of one's fellows—and perhaps marked a certain stage of intoxication. Some of the vows uttered by the ancients remind strangely of modern election bets or vows, as, for example, the one made by Harold Hairfair before his unification of Norway not to comb or cut his hair until the whole of the land should be united under his rule.[13]

Indoor Amusements: Man-Matching and Flyting

Another form of amusement which took place when groups of men were gathered in the halls was called man-matching. In this, two or more members of the company chose men of prominence whose reputations they wished to exalt and defend against the champions selected by the others. In some respects, this contest had the character of a debate, but there was perhaps no formal judging in deciding upon the victor.[14] This variety of pastime was likely to result in quarrels, but the average Northman seems to have dearly loved a quarrel. And even more provocative of broils was the very common custom of making satirical rhymes. Sometimes a person having a gift for rhyming would make personal attacks upon other members of the company; but more frequently the rhyming took the form of a contest between two different people for mere pleasure or a prize. Such an attack or contest was called "tongue-ply," or *flyting*, and those who took part in it

[12] Nyrop, Kr., "En middelalderlig Skik," in *Nordisk Tidskrift för Vetenskap, Konst och Industri*, IV, 312–318.

[13] *Saga Library*, III, 93–95.

[14] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 117.

lashed each other most abusively with their tongues, the one asking mocking questions to which the other returned insulting replies.[15]

Saga-Telling

Saga-telling—the narration of events connected with the careers of prominent men, living or dead—formed a more dignified and pleasing form of entertainment. This was a common pastime in Iceland and Norway, especially in the former, while farther east more emphasis, proportionally speaking, seems to have been placed upon poetry. Few large groups of people were without a poet or two, and these recited or sang their compositions for the pleasure of the company. Often, if the host was a man of prominence, a professional bard or minstrel was present for the occasion, and he might select for his theme the great deeds of his host, or those of some particularly honored guest of the assemblage.[16]

Music

In the earlier part of the period under consideration, the bard seems to have sung unaccompanied, but later, after the harp had been introduced from the Celtic lands, in imitation of the minstrels of the south, they picked out the tune upon the harp strings as they sang.[17] From the south also came the rebec, or fiddle, perhaps at about the same time as the harp. Previous to the introduction of these stringed instruments from abroad, the North seems to have possessed only very simple musical instruments, on the order of the trumpet or lure, which is now used in the remoter parts for calling the cattle home. But these pipes were perhaps employed then, as now, only for

[15] *Ibid.*, 377; *Njála*, 24–25.

[16] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 184, 712; *Saga Library*, III, 37; Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 177.

[17] Bugge, *Vesterlandenes Indflydelse*, 244.

practical purposes, as for summoning the forces to battle and for ordering an attack upon the enemy. But what the ancient Scandinavians lacked in instrumental music they probably made up by means of the voice, for they were very fond of singing. And at social gatherings not only did the soloist entertain the company by his singing, but the whole assemblage also united in singing compositions of the ballad or folk-song order, the theme of which was often an event of mere local interest but one which had stirred the community. Similar songs in large numbers are composed and sung in present day Scandinavia, especially in the more out-of-the-way districts.

Dancing

The part played by the dance during the early Middle Ages is not evident, though this form of recreation and amusement was probably always indulged in by the Scandinavians to some extent, for dancing is found among virtually all primitive peoples. It is clear, however, that later this exercise was very common and by about the end of the eleventh century it came to be opposed by the Christian clergy, on account of the alleged loose character of some of the dances. But there is no reason to believe that even the worst of these were actually any more objectionable than some of the fashionable dances of the present day. Most of the ancient dances were dramatic in form and were accompanied by spoken dialogues or by songs, usually the latter. Some were slow and stately, while others were violent and included much springing and jumping. Many of the peasant dances now found in Scandinavia are doubtless very similar in character to the ancient ones, and it is very probable also that some of the early dances, modified in form, still survive in the dramatic games of the children, a few of which, like "hunt the slipper,"

are also common in England and the United States.[18]

Besides the bards, rich hosts often supplied other special entertainers for their guests, such as jesters and jugglers who amused the audience by their antics, tricks, and grotesque dances;[19] and men and women who told the fortunes of those present.[20] Some believed, while others did not, but all were interested or amused by these "wise" ones. This latter class of entertainers was common in the North and long established,[21] while the former was much less usual and was probably of recent introduction.

Juggling and Fortune-Telling

For small gatherings and also for quiet family entertainment a table game, played upon specially designed boards, with sculptured figures of painted wood, bone, ivory, or silver was very popular (Figs. 38, 40). This game was very old in the North, and in its original form probably resembled checkers, but during the Viking Age it was modified through the influence of the South and East and became more similar to chess.[22] Whether prizes were

Table Games

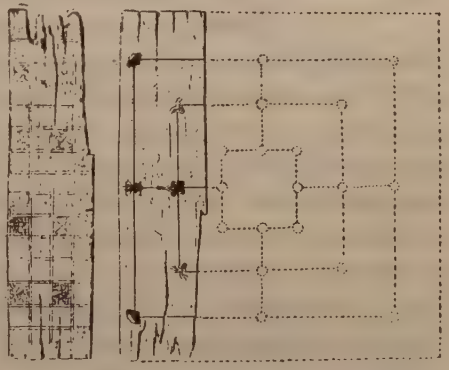


Fig. 40. Pieces of Boards for a Table Game. (From Bugge's *Norges Historie.*)

[18] "Danz," in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary; Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 464–466; Hildebrand, Hans, *Sveriges Medeltid*, II, 497–501.

[19] Keyser, *Private Life of the Old Northmen*, 163–164.

[20] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 478, 612.

[21] See above pp. 404–410.

[22] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 557, 618; Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 138, 177–178; Bugge, *Nordboernes Indflydelse*, 242; Fiske, Willard, *Chess in Iceland and Icelandic Literature.*

awarded to the winners of this game is not apparent; but there is no doubt that dice-shaking, which was also common in the North, was played for definite stakes; for the people of classical lands were notorious gamblers with dice, as were also the Germans of Tacitus' time, and it seems likely that the pastime reached Scandinavia at a very early date. Judging from the finds in the tombs of the North, the cubes used in the game were generally made of bone, though at times of ivory, and they were very similar in pattern to the modern dice.

The Presentation of Gifts to Guests

The bestowal of presents upon at least the most prominent of the guests by the host or hostess was a very important part of every elaborate house-party or banquet. In fact, the presentation of gifts was virtually obligatory in most cases, if friendship was to be secured and preserved; for peace and good will lay in gifts. Moreover, the giver fully expected that in due time a gift of approximately equal value would be made by the recipient. "Gift always looks for return," says a very old Scandinavian proverb.[23] And that the same frank commercialism still persists in connection with the bestowal of presents is apparent from the common saying in Sweden to-day that "Give and give back makes for long friendships." Not to make proper counter gifts was looked upon as degrading as well as dishonorable.

The value of the present made by the host was determined by the rank of the guest and the closeness of the friendship existing between him and the host. Among persons of wealth the gifts were often very costly; we read frequently in the sagas of ships, costly sails, white bears, oxen, horses, jewelry, richly decorated weapons, expensive clothes, and currency in the shape of large

[23] *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, I, 12, 17.

amounts of wadmal being given away at elaborate banquets.

Custom varied as to when the distribution of presents should be made. Sometimes it was done when the period of banqueting was half over,[24] though this was probably exceptional. More often the bestowal of these material compliments took place when the guests were departing; and, as it was quite customary for the host to accompany honored guests for a short distance upon their return journey before saying farewell, sometimes the presentation of gifts—especially if the gifts were small in bulk—was delayed until this final leave-taking.[25]

Outdoor Amusements: Sports

The Northmen loved the great out-of-doors; hence, the amusements and pastimes which they enjoyed under the open sky were numerous. In the winter there were skeeing and snow-shoeing, sledding, and skating upon the ice, the skates used probably being most frequently made, like those still used in the western islands, from the smooth shin bones of animals.[26] The men also played games upon the ice. Among the rich, hunting and hawking were followed primarily for the sake of the sport connected with these activities, women as well as men taking part in them.

The pursuit of the wild animals of the North for sport took place as a rule in the summer time, which was obviously the season for out-door amusements; but the high-tide of summer pleasures and recreations came at the midsummer political meetings. When the weather was very bad, the folk remained within their booths and

[24] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 84.

[25] Keyser, *Private Life of the Old Northmen*, 147.

[26] Annandale, Nelson, "The Survival of Primitive Implements, Materials, and Methods in the Faroes and South Iceland," in *Journal Anthropological Institute*, XXXIII, 251–252.

tents and occupied themselves very much as they did during the winter festivals, but most of the leisure from the work of government was devoted to athletic and other contests under the open sky. The men only seem to have taken part in these, but the women and girls, dressed in their gayest and most becoming garments, formed an interested and substantial part of the on-lookers. To the most popular young woman often fell the task of awarding the prize to the champion.

Mock Thing Assemblies

In the eleventh century the young men of Iceland developed a sort of burlesque upon the legislative and judicial procedure followed by their elders. These mock thing meetings were very popular and the youths of the district in which they were held flocked to them—to the embarrassment of their elders, whose dignity was outraged by them. Such mimic assemblies were probably most often held in connection with the regular thing gatherings.

Athletic Contests

Because of the stern necessity for physical strength in the North of the viking time, competitive exercises for the sake of developing and displaying such strength or skill in self-defense were always popular. There were running-, jumping-, and swimming-contests, and matches in fencing, archery, and spear-throwing; but perhaps the wrestling bouts and tugs-of-war attracted larger crowds. The ancient Scandinavians showed remarkable skill in wrestling, an expertness which the Icelanders, at least, have not yet lost. The wrestlers, stripped to the waist, used the legs in the struggle even more than the arms, and displayed a quickness and dexterity in attack and defense perhaps unequalled in any other part of Europe at the period.

Two games largely dependent upon sheer strength were

virtually the same as the modern tug-of-war. In one, the contestants used a long rawhide rope, and in the other, they fought over a fresh raw skin or hide. In the latter sport, which was called a "skin game," two persons, as a rule, played, one man seizing each side of the skin and trying to jerk or pull it from his opponent and thus throw him to the ground.[27] Sometimes men of one district challenged those of another to such contests as have just been described; but no prizes seem to have been offered to the victors in such a case, the mere fame of championship evidently being considered ample reward.[28]

Ball Games

By means of pieces of turf the men played a game which was perhaps not unlike the modern horseshoe or bean-bags;[29] but they were more fond of ball games, of which there appear to have been several sorts, but one special variety seems to have been the favorite. This generally took place upon the ice or upon the smooth surface of the ground. The players used bats and balls of wood, and the main object was presumably to keep control of the ball; but the details of the sport cannot be clearly determined from the descriptions given in the sagas.[30] So popular was this game that it was not only played at the thing meetings, but in some parts the men from large districts of country also met after harvest for the express purpose of indulging their fondness for it. On these occasions the game was at times played in great halls built for the purpose, rather than out of doors—probably because of the uncertainty of the weather at this time of year—

[27] Keyser, *Private Life of the Old Northmen*, 149–151.
[28] *Ibid.*, 152.
[29] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 122.
[30] *Ibid.*, 314; Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden*, 177; *Gísla*, 34–37.

though it is possible that the ball game played in halls differed from the popular out-door sport with bat and ball. In Iceland the meetings for the purpose of playing this autumnal game often lasted for two weeks or more. Though the women folk probably at times went along to witness the games, such gatherings appear to have been on the whole distinctly men's affairs; and not only was the whole body of spectators made up of men, but the men also performed the culinary duties of the establishments.[31]

Horse-Fighting

Probably the most characteristic as well as popular amusement occupying the leisure of the attendants upon the thing was horse-fighting, a pastime much preferred to horse-racing, though the latter sport was also engaged in. Horse-fighting seems to have been particularly common in Iceland, and was witnessed, like the other sports, by the women as well as the men. The contests generally began as the result of a challenge from some man owning a stallion, the fighting qualities of which he wished to test or display. The fight generally took place upon a plain near an elevation upon which the spectators could gather. The animals attacked with hoofs and front teeth, frequently urged on by their owners by means of sharp sticks. Often several couples of stallions fought at the same time, each having its group of on-lookers (Fig. 41), and sometimes the struggle between the maddened animals was permitted to continue until one or both were dead. The contests were judged by men selected for the purpose, and it is probable that during the course of the fight heavy betting was indulged in.[32]

[31] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 326; II, 123.

[32] Schönfeld, *Das Pferd*, 139–145; Keyser, *Private Life of the Old Northmen*, 153, 162–163.

Fig. 41. A Horse Fight in Iceland. From an Ancient Drawing. (From Olrik's *Aandsliv i Vikingetid*)

CHAPTER XIX

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE; THE RUNES

Ulf Uggason was of the bidden guests, and he had made a poem on Olaf Huskoldson and of the legends that were painted round the hall, and he gave it forth at the feast. This poem is called the "House Song" and is well made. Olaf rewarded him well for the poem.

Laxdaela Saga.

THE tongues spoken by the Scandinavian peoples at the present time all show an intimate connection with the great Teutonic family of languages; but they display a still closer relationship with one another—an affinity resulting from the fact that they all developed from the same branch of the Teutonic linguistic tree. At some period far distant in the pre-historic past, the portion of the Germanic peoples from which the Northmen developed became isolated in the Scandinavian lands; and through this isolation, and also as a result of their peculiar environment, their speech took on characteristics of its own, which made it—perhaps centuries before the Christian era—a distinct language. As the early rune stones prove, this ancient tongue was the same throughout Scandinavia; but as time passed and foreign contact increased, further changes took place, in consequence of which, by the year 800, at the beginning of the Viking Age, the tongue employed in the North not only showed great modification from the primitive Scandinavian, but also displayed dialectical differences tending to separate the speech of Denmark and Sweden from that of Norway. However, the sectional characteristics which had developed were,

The "Danish Tongue"

as yet, probably no greater than those which distinguish the speech of the man of the Lower South of the United States from that of the New Englander; and they were probably much less marked than the differences in speech now existing between various parts of England. The Scandinavians still regarded their language as one and the same throughout the North and called it *Donsk tunga,* the "Danish tongue"[1] because of the dominance of Denmark at the time. During the viking period, however, particularly after the settlement of Iceland, near the close of the ninth century, rapid changes—perhaps largely caused by contact with the outer world in three different directions—took place. And by the time Christianity was introduced into the North, around the year 1000, there were distinguishable in that region four different dialects, which have since developed into the four literary languages of Scandinavia—Icelandic, Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish.

General Scandinavian Literary Interest

The possession of a common language by the Northern people made possible the development of a common literature; and that such a general literary growth did take place there can be no reasonable doubt. Though many of the writings which have come down to the present time were doubtless composed entirely by Icelanders, and many others were at least given their final stamp or form by people from that western island, it is well known that a good fraction of this literature is of Norwegian origin; and it is evident from the

[1] It is stated in one of the sagas that till the Norman conquest the language spoken in England was the same as that of Denmark and Norway (*Gunnlaugs Saga Ormstungu,* 11); but this was probably true only of the Danelaw and the other parts settled by the Northmen. The speech of the people of Anglo-Saxon descent, though possessing much in common with the Scandinavian tongue, was, nevertheless, a distinct language.

themes of some of the compositions that they had a broad Scandinavian, rather than a local Icelandic, derivation. Some evidence of this lies in the fact that in Sweden has been found a stone giving a detailed pictorial representation of the story of Siegfried—the only such picture so far found in the North. Moreover, the fact that great numbers of Danish and Swedish rune stones bearing brief verses have survived to the present,[2] goes further to prove that the two older sections of Scandinavia had their bards, perhaps as skilled as the poets and skalds of the western part of the Northland whose compositions have been preserved through a thousand years.

Practically the whole body of literature produced by Eastern Scandinavia during the heathen period has been lost; and for the same reasons that very little pre-Christian Teutonic writing of any sort, except the Icelandic, has survived—indifference to its preservation and the actual destructive intolerance of Christianity and Christian sovereigns towards things pagan.

Reason for the Survival of Icelandic Literature

Until the Christian period, the great bulk of Northern literature was preserved only in the minds of the poets and people. The sharp shifting of interest coming with Christianity would naturally cause indifference to the old pagan treasures, if not positive aversion to them; and, hence, a noble body of literature was lost to later ages. Iceland's literature was saved largely because that nation was so happy and so unique as to introduce the new religion peacefully, and by popular vote. At the time when Christian doctrines began to be influential in Iceland that land was a self-governing republic; there was no despotic monarch to force his will upon the popu-

[2] Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 177; Worsaae, J. J. A., *The Pre-History of the North*, 193.

lation. The Althing, it was, that voted the adoption of Christianity; but though the Christians were sufficiently numerous to carry the measure, there yet remained a strong, loyal heathen minority which had to be reckoned with. And this minority did perhaps more than all other influences towards cherishing the ancient literary compositions until the Christian priests, who were as a rule natives,—rather than foreigners, as was often the case in other lands,—with a patriotic interest in the heathen past, could commit the literature to writing. Another factor which served to save the Icelandic literature for later generations was the prolongation of the Viking Age as a literary period. There was no cessation of the literary output in consequence of the christianization of Iceland; rather, a greater enthusiasm for literature than had before existed was created through the influence of these Christian Icelandic priests, whose adoption of the new faith did not blind them to the beauties of the songs and sagas of their heathen forbears.

General Character of the Literature

The literature produced and preserved by the Scandinavian North is a real national body of writing, unequalled by any other literary compositions of the Middle Ages. In view particularly of the confirmed ecclesiastical spirit of most of Europe during the period, this Northern literary bloom is most unique; and, in consequence, is a contribution which deserves the deep gratitude of subsequent generations. At a time when interest in things intellectual and literary scarcely extended beyond the monastic walls and when the literary output of the continent was in the form of dreary church chronicles of saints and martyrs, tiresomely told, these virile inhabitants of the Far North created a literature original

in form, narrating in prose the deeds of real, red-blooded men and women living in a natural secular world and meeting and giving battle to the problems which the Fates sent their way; or singing in meter their own hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, or the praise of the valor and wisdom of the sturdy gods of Northern heathendom.

Age of Oldest Poetry of North

The age of the earliest surviving Scandinavian poetry has been a subject of considerable discussion among scholars;[3] but there seems to be no doubt that some of it antedates the viking period. And there is also good reason to believe that far back in the prehistoric times the North had its bards and its songs. But this hypothetical, pre-historic verse is shut away in the unvoiced past; and that which has come down to us is the product of a literary revival resulting from Scandinavian contact with the outside world during the early Middle Ages. It is probable that practically all of this surviving poetry was composed between the ninth and thirteenth centuries.[4]

The whole body of Northern verse worthy of the name of poetry[5] may be divided broadly into two large classes:

[3] Jónsson, Finnur, *Den Islandske Litteraturs Historie, tilligemed den Old Norske*, 34 ff.

[4] *Ibid.;* Jónsson, Finnur, "Om Skjaldepoesien og de Aeldste Skjalde," in *Arkiv* for Nordisk Filologi, vol. VI, no. II, 122.

[5] The verse of the North varied greatly in aim and method, and, hence, in quality. At least among the Western Scandinavians, poetic compositions played an important part in daily converse. A thousand years ago, as at present in Iceland, it was very common for people, whether professional poets or not, to introduce meter and rhyme into conversation in the form of question and reply. (*Glúma, passim; Saga Olafs Konungs ens Helga, passim.*) The rhyming games with which the Northmen amused themselves were mentioned in the preceding chapter. These two varieties of informal versification were entirely extemporaneous, and, considering this fact, some examples are remarkably good. Another inferior class of verse already mentioned, which was very common in ancient Scandinavia, was that of an insulting or libellous character directed against

the earlier, or eddaic poems and the later, or skaldic, compositions. The former class has been preserved in the collection long known as the *Elder Edda,* or the *Edda of Saemund the Wise,* though it is not at all likely that the Icelandic scholar Saemund had anything to do with even the preservation of the poems. Who composed the eddaic poems in their original form will probably never be known; but it is quite certain that many people contributed towards the creation of the verses which have come down to the present; and doubtless in many cases more than one mind helped give the existing form to individual poems. These ancient verses are mythic and heroic in subject; they treat of the deeds of the gods and heroes of the Northland. Those of mythic theme combine simplicity with grandeur; by means of telling, vigorous strokes, they furnish majestic pictures of the virile, wholesome mythology of Scandinavian barbarism and heathenism. The heroic lays, though of less grandeur of subject, are yet a noble body of literature. They treat in some cases of the same traditions as the lays of the Nibelungs, but show less of Christian influence, and, hence, in all probability, resemble more closely the heathen Teutonic original.

Eddaic Poetry

Though probably in most cases they assumed in Western Scandinavia the form which they now possess,[6] the surviving eddaic poems may properly be regarded as the gift of the whole Scandinavian North, rather than of any one special section; for they are "the true expression of the popular spirit of the North, which re-

an enemy and called nid verse. But probably few, or none, of these compositions deserve to be classed as literature.

[6] Jónsson, *Den Islandske Litteraturs Historie,* 37–41; Bugge, *Norges Historie,* vol. I, pt. II, 114; Bugge, Sophus, *The Home of the Eddic Poems, with Special Reference to the Helgi-Lays.*

vealed itself around the lakes of Sweden and on the flat fields of Denmark, in the same manner as among the mountains of Norway,"[7] and along the fiord-indented, volcano-lit shores of Iceland. It must suffice to mention briefly a few of the most famous of these ancient poems. *Völuspá,* which exists only in fragmentary form, is one of the most valuable, and presents many of the principal subjects of Scandinavian mythology, beginning with the creation of the world and terminating with its final destruction. *Hávamál,* the Lesson of the High One, or Odin, though very different from the preceding, is important, for it contains many proverbs and rules for conduct which throw much light upon the ethical standards and superstitious views of the ancients. *Rigsmál,* or *Rigsthula,* a narrative poem, credits to the god Heimdall the origin of the three distinct classes of society found in the North and describes the occupations and accomplishments of each class. But the most finished and charming of the selections in this group is *Thrymskvitha,* or the Song of Thrym, which is of a distinctly humorous character, and describes in a vigorous, graphic manner how Thor, by borrowing some of the goddess Freyia's clothes and disguising as a bride, regained his famous hammer from the giant Thrym who had stolen it. The most famous of the heroic lays are the twenty dealing to a greater or less degree with the two great families of Volsungs and Nibelungs. These, however, must be looked upon as only broken fragments, perhaps much modified, of a great poetic saga long since lost to the world.[8]

[7] Horn, Frederik Winkel, *History of the Literature of the Scandinavian North,* 28–29.

[8] Copies of the poems of the Elder Edda may be found in various places. The complete original texts of many of them, accompanied by an English translation, are given in Vigfusson and Powell's collection, *Corpus Poeticum*

Skaldic Poetry

The skaldic poems, practically all of which are creations of the historic period, are, on the whole, inferior to the earlier heroic and mythic verse. The authors of these later poems are known in most cases, for, to the skald, poetry was a profession. These "verse-smiths" had much in common with the early troubadours of southern France; both were lovers of variety and adventure who wandered about from one feasting hall to another singing of the mighty deeds of historical individuals, often their contemporaries and sometimes their hosts; or they established themselves permanently as a part of the household of an important chieftain or king, whose adventures they shared and praised in verse. The skalds wandered throughout Greater Scandinavia; wherever the "Danish tongue" was known they were welcomed and honored. Most of the poets whose names have survived were men of good family, and many of them were of partly Celtic ancestry. Among the greatest were Egil Skalagrimsson, of the earlier part of the Viking Age, whose verses, though somewhat crude, are true and noble; Kormak, also famed as a champion in battle; Eyvind, the skald of King Haakon; Sighvat, the most prolific composer of his time, who was the poet of Saint Olaf; Thormod, Coalbrow's skald, who died singing at the close of a great battle; and Einar Skuluson and Markus the Lawman, Icelanders of the twelfth century, whose ornate verses indicate that a period of literary decline and degeneracy was at hand.

The ancient poetry displays various interesting characteristics, the most noticeable being alliteration, which, however, is found in all ancient Teutonic poetry. Each

Boreale. A much earlier and freer translation is that of Benjamin Thorpe, known as *Edda Saemundar hinns Frotha.*

stanza, or strophe, is generally made up of eight verses, four of these being so related that each half of the strophe contains an independent thought. These two parts of the strophe are in turn divided into units of two lines, each pair closely related in thought and bound together by alliteration. This alliterative arrangement was governed by fairly well fixed laws. In the two lines belonging together three words are found which begin with the same letters.[9] Two of the words must be in the first line, while the third usually came at the beginning of the second. The third, or last, of these letters was called the "chief letter," because it was looked upon as ruling over the two others, which were, therefore, called "sub-letters." The verses were also divided metrically into accented and unaccented syllables, the principal meter being the *fornyrðálag,* which had two feet, or accents, in each of the eight lines.[10] But other forms did exist, one of the most common being the *ljódaháttr,* a strophe of six lines, in the third and sixth of which the alliteration was independent, while the first two lines and the last two belonged together.[11]

Rules Governing Northern Poetry

In the period of the skalds a much greater variety of form developed, and the lines became longer, with three, four, or even more, feet. The most common stanza was

[9] In the oldest poems there were often only two such words.

[10] The following is an example of this form:

*H*eidi hana hétu — *S*eid hon hvars hun kunni,
Hvars til *h*usa kom — *S*eid hon hugleikin,
*V*ölu *v*elspá — *Æ* var hon *a*ngan
*V*itti hon ganda; — *I*llrar brudar.

From *Völuspa,* quoted in Horn, *Literature of the Scandinavian North,* 34.

[11] The following is an example of *ljódaháttr:*

Deyr *f*é — *E*k veit *e*inn
Deyja *f*rændr — At *a*ldri deyr
Deyr *s*jálf it *s*ama. — *D*ómr um *d*audan hvern.

From *Havamál,* quoted in Horn, *Scandinavian Literature,* 34.

that made up of eight three-foot lines and called the *dróttkvaeði.* Alliteration was employed very much as before, but to it were now added syllable rhymes and half rhymes. A perfect rhyme demanded that two of the syllables in the same line correspond perfectly; and a half rhyme, that they have different vowels before the same consonant or combination of consonants.[12] The masculine and feminine rhymes employed at the present time were also used to some extent, but were not very common.

The most unique characteristic of the skaldic poetry, however, is the extreme to which the use of figurative language is carried. In the Elder Edda a certain amount of figurativeness of expression is found, but the early skalds increased the practice, and this tendency continued to be exaggerated by their successors, with the result that the late skaldic poetry furnishes the most extreme examples of poetic artificiality in existence. This literary degeneration did not appear, however, until the Viking Age was virtually ended, and the natural spontaneity and vigor of poetic expression had temporarily passed from the Northmen. So far-fetched were the figures that the poems could not possibly be interpreted without a key, but this was supplied by the Younger Edda, which is really a poet's hand-book, containing rules by which the maker of verses must be guided. Some of the figurative language is very beautiful, but when it was employed by poets of mediocre ability, versification became a mere

[12] The following is an example of *dróttkvaeði:*

Bramani skein *brunа*	En *sa geisli syslir*
Brims of ljósum *himni*	*Sithan* gullmens *Frithar*
Hristar hörvi glaestrar	*Hvarma* tungls oy *hringa*
*Hauk*frann a mik *lauka*	*Hlinar* othurft mina.

From the Icelandic poet Gunnlaug Ormstunga, quoted in Horn, *Scandinavian Literature,* 35.

play with words.[13] In the most artificial compositions very few things are called by their proper, everyday names; for the poets had a language of their own. Rain, for instance, was called "Freyia's tears"; the sword was the "fire of the shield"; the shield was the "war-roof"; while the warrior was the "wielder of the fire of the war-roof." [14]

Prose

Unlike the poetry of the prehistoric North, the prose which has survived from the later viking period is, for the most part, local, rather than national, in character; and to a great extent it is Icelandic in theme and setting; though some of the sagas, as those of the Kings of Norway, are exceptions, as well as some of the shorter tales. It is very probable that compositions of a nature similar to those of Norway also existed in ancient times in Denmark and Sweden; but it does not seem likely that any of the continental countries of the North produced sagas of such intimate, personal nature as those of Iceland, the character of which is due largely to the geography and history of the island itself. The Icelanders are descended from the proud, high-spirited men and women who fled from what would have been to them oppression, and, like the New England

[13] Jónsson, *Litteraturs Historie*, 27–28.

[14] The following literal translation of the quotation from Gunnlaug Ormstunga, given upon page 340, will convey an idea of the nature of the figurative language and the extent to which it was at times employed. The meaning of the figures is given in parentheses.

"The moon of the eye-brows (the eye) of the white-clad goddess of the onion soup (the one who prepares the onion soup, a woman) shone beaming on me as that of a falcon from the clear heaven of the eye-brows (the forehead), but the beaming splendor from the moon of the eye-lids (the eye) of the goddess of the gold ring (the woman) causes since then the unhappiness of me and of the goddess of the ring (the woman)."

In direct prose the meaning of the quotation is the following: "The eye of the white-clad woman shone beaming as that of a falcon on me from her forehead, but the beaming splendor of her eye causes mine and the woman's unhappiness." From Horn, *Scandinavian Literature*, 37.

Pilgrims, sought homes in a remote wilderness where they could secure freedom for themselves and their children. This being the case, the first few generations of their descendants, in particular, were certain to make much of their origin from these pioneers; and the stories of the adventurous careers of prominent early settlers were handed down from generation to generation, through being told around the open fires during the long winter evenings. And thus the saga peculiar to Western Scandinavia came into existence. In a similar manner the inhabitants of the interior of Iceland even now originate sagas and transmit them to others.

The Sagas

In length and in subject matter, these prose tales vary greatly; some are so long as to fill an average-sized printed volume, while others would cover but a few pages. These shorter stories are sometimes called *thaettir*. A part of the sagas are almost pure history; others are virtually wholly fiction; and the remainder are made up of varying proportions of fact and fancy. Generally speaking, the historical sagas —most of which are among the earliest of the prose compositions of the North—are the best; but some fine samples of literature are to be found also among the stories which are purely imaginative. The saga at its best—that is, the real saga of the North—is a sort of prose epic formed carefully according to certain very definite rules of literary composition. It required much artistic skill in its formation, though it seems so very direct and artless. In it there appear certain set phrases and epithets, and a regular form of beginning and ending. Though the historical saga is generally a sketch of the career of an Icelander or Norseman of the warrior type, it usually contains a long introduction—perhaps forming a third of the whole—which is devoted to the hero's

ancestors, going back, in the case of an Icelander, to the forefather who was among the first settlers in Iceland, or even further back and sketching briefly the lives of one or two generations of ancestors in Norway. Next, is probably presented a short narrative of the viking voyages which occupied his young manhood, or his career at the court of Norway, or of some other country of western Europe. Then will follow a more detailed account of the hero's life after he had settled down in Iceland, including his betrothal and marriage, his business ventures, his friendships and his enmities, his lawsuits, and the part played by him and his supporters in following up the virtually inevitable feud, and his death—most often a violent one—the whole concluding with a description of the revenge taken for him by his kindred and friends.

The saga is presented in an earnest, frank, straightforward manner such as would be employed by one telling a story to a group of listeners. The sentences are short, simple, and vigorous. Here and there an explanatory phrase or sentence is thrown in, or a statement to make the narrative more easy to follow—as, the explanation, regarding a minor character, "He is now out of the story." There appear no descriptions of scenery, in which the people of the period took little interest; but these ancient tales abound in detailed accounts of the dress, weapons, and general equipment of the leading characters. And striking word pictures often appear of the principal characters themselves; by means of a few terse, well-selected phrases, the sagaman presented a satisfactory portrait before the mental eye of his listeners. These prose epics are almost wholly objective; there was no attempt on the part of the story-teller to unravel the mental processes of his characters, though the

sagas show the narrator to be possessed of psychological insight. Each character presents his inner self through the words and actions attributed to him by the sagaman, and the personalities thus portrayed are usually very clear cut and vivid. There are no duplicates, and each character is a real individual. Occasionally, however, brief, direct characterizations are given—generally in connection with the description of the physical appearance—to indicate the disposition of the person described.

Very little dialogue is to be found, and what there is is crisp and laconic; the people of the sagas do not waste words; they are for action rather than for speech. But into the conversation are often introduced the wise saws of which the Scandinavians are still very fond, to add pith and significance to the dialogue. The humor usually appears only in the conversational parts and is quiet and dry, sometimes grim, and always very real. In the exhibition of pathos the Teutonic reserve is evident; a few brief words often reveal effectively a whole tragedy. If the hero is a poet,—as in the case of Egil Skalagrimsson, Gunnlaug Ormstunga, and others,—many of his extemporaneous verses are woven into the narrative of his career, and thus the sagaman secures variety, and increases the beauty of his composition. Interest is also often increased by adding the element of the supernatural. And women, fickle and faithful, clever and stupid, petty, brave, and revengeful, but always interesting, are usually there also to vary the story.

Nevertheless, a great monotony exists in the plots of the sagas, which is increased by the use of the conventional terms and set phrases. A succession of the sagas makes, therefore, rather monotonous reading; and it is somewhat difficult to keep clearly in mind the careers

of the heroes of each of the prose tales; but as Vigfusson has suggested, the monotony was probably not noticeable in the oral narration because of the interest produced by the facial expression, the inflection of voice, and the gestures employed by the sagaman.[15]

Before passing from the subject of the sagas, some of the greatest of these Northern epics should have special mention. *Njála,* or *Njalssaga,* is generally conceded to be the masterpiece of ancient Icelandic literature. It is one of the longest of the sagas and deals with events connected with the last part of the tenth century. The hero is the noble lawman, Njal, who was burned to death in his own home by his enemies. The story throws much light upon early Icelandic history, and particularly upon the court system and the administration of justice. Another of the long tales is *Grettissaga,* which sketches the career of Gretti the Strong who spent much of his life in outlawry. Into this saga is interwoven considerable myth and superstition. The *Laxdoelasaga* is especially fine in its delineation of character; it has also an unusually pleasing literary style, and displays an appreciation of nature almost completely lacking in the other prose compositions.

Some of the Greatest Sagas

One of the most interesting of the shorter sagas is the story of Hen-Thore, a mean-dispositioned peddler of poultry who lived in the southwestern part of Iceland. This saga is very old, but *Kormakssaga,* one of the very few love stories of the ancient North, seems to show greater antiquity. *Gunnlaugssaga,* already mentioned in another connection, is also a story of love. There is great sentimental charm in this tale and also deep tragedy. A work displaying an unusual amount of hu-

[15] Vigfusson, Gudbrand, *Prolegomena to Sturlunga Saga.*

mor is *Bandamannasaga*, the story of the Banded Men. Other sagas of special interest because of their historical value as well as their literary quality are those throwing light upon the discovery and settlement of Greenland and the finding of Vinland, and those narrating the lives of the kings of Norway. Perhaps the most famous of this group is the saga of Eric the Red. One of the most interesting of the very short sagas is that of Audun the Lucky, who acquired wealth and standing in his community through the shrewd bestowal of a Greenland polar bear upon the king of Denmark.[16]

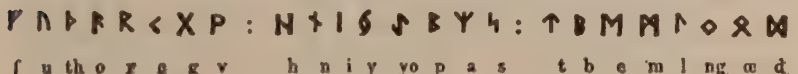
The Runes

A treatment of ancient Northern literature raises the question of whether the verse and prose which have been described were completely transmitted from generation to generation by word of mouth and preserved simply by means of the finely trained memories of the ancients, or whether some system of recording them was employed before the introduction of Latin script with Christianity. This brings up a consideration of the runes, since they supplied the only possible means of record at the time when the best of the ancient literature was being produced, as well as for long afterwards. There are two runic futhorcs,[17] or alphabets: an earlier, composed of twenty-four characters, common to all Teutonic peoples; and a later, made up of sixteen letters, peculiar only to the Scandinavians (Fig. 42). The later runes found in Norway and Sweden are slightly different from the contemporary ones of Denmark, those in the last-named showing closer resemblance

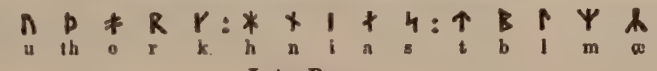
[16] Most of the sagas have been translated into English. Many of the longer translations have been published separately, while the shorter ones may be found in various collections.

[17] The runic characters are called "futhorcs" for the same reason that the phonetic signs employed by the classical peoples are called "alphabet." The first six letters of the former are f, u, p (th), o, r, c.

to the general Teutonic characters; but the variation is very slight.[18] Like the classical alphabets, the original runes ran from left to right, but at a very early date the reverse order came also to be employed; and the two methods long continued side by side. The use of the



Earlier Runes from the Vadstena bracteate.



Later Runes.

Fig. 42. Two Types of Runic Characters.

two orders contemporaneously appears to have been influential in introducing the snake or dragon figures previously mentioned in which the runic characters were inclosed.[19]

Origin of the Runes

It now seems established beyond a doubt that the runes are not an independent Teutonic creation, as some scholars once believed. Instead, they are of classical origin, and are derived primarily from the alphabet used by the Greeks of the eastern part of the Eastern Empire for their common cursive or running hand-writing. Only a few of the runes seem to have come directly from the Latin.[20] The Germanic tribes nearest to the borders of the Empire probably first became acquainted with the classical characters, and gradually the knowledge was transmitted farther to the north; but as the alphabet migrated it underwent a gradual change resulting in the twenty-six runic

18 Friesen, von, *Upplands Runstenar*, 5.

19 Wimmer, *Die Runenschrift*, 159.

20 Friesen, Otto von, "Om Runskriftens Härkomst," in *Språkvetenskapliga Sällskapets i Uppsala Förhandlingar*, vol. II, 1894–1906.

signs which were in use in Scandinavia at least as early as the year 300 A. D.[21] The modification was doubtless produced and accelerated partly by the fact that for a considerable period after a knowledge of classical writing had been introduced among the Northmen the connection between them and the Greek and Roman world was broken by invasions of the Huns and other Asiatic peoples.[22] After a few more centuries, the geographic isolation which gave to the people of the North a special language also brought about the reduction of the original number of runes to the sixteen which form the special Scandinavian futhorc.

Media Employed in Forming the Runes

The word "rune" signifies a secret or mystery, a meaning probably arising from the fact that a knowledge of runic writing was possessed by only a minority of the people, which led the uninitiated majority to look upon this ability to transmit one's thoughts by means of symbols as something beyond ordinary comprehension—an attitude displayed by all primitive peoples towards the art of writing This element of mystery made it natural for the ignorant to attribute a secret, magical power to runes, and explains why one of their most common uses was for charms. When thus employed, the runic symbols were put wherever it was desired that the magic be exercised. They were wrought into metal by hammer and chisel; carved upon wood, bone, stone, and ivory; woven or embroidered into cloth of one sort or another; and inscribed by means of charcoal or brush and coloring matter upon the smooth surface of textiles, skin, and wood.[23]

[21] *Ibid.*
[22] Bugge, *Die Wikinger*, 213.
[23] See below, pp. 404–406.

The use of runes for epitaphs and memorial inscriptions will be treated in the chapter upon death and burial; but it should here be mentioned that they were also employed in the homes of the living in the form of invocations to the gods cut upon the walls, and also occasionally for narrating briefly the heroic deeds of the head of the house. When performing the latter function, they were perhaps most often combined with pictorial carvings in bas-relief.[24] In a somewhat similar manner family history was still inscribed upon walls, beds, chairs, and other pieces of furniture in the remoter parts of Iceland in modern times.[25] It is not unlikely that the characters were also used for some sort of time schedule, the prototype of the runic calendars cut on wood found in the remoter parts of Sweden during the past century.[26] And beyond a doubt the runes were employed for conveying messages directly, for which purpose they were cut upon a wooden stick or staff, called a *kefli*. Gísla, the outlaw, for instance, upon finding that Thorkel would not come out of his dwelling, took a stick, cut runes upon it, and threw it into the house through an opening. Thorkel, after reading the message cut upon the stick, came out and greeted Gísla.[27] Dumb people also at times communicated by means of rune-sticks.[28]

Use of Runes for Conveying Practical Information

Though there is no trustworthy direct evidence to prove such use, in view of the various other functions which they served, there is no good reason to doubt that

[24] *Njála*, 276.

[25] Olassen and Povelsen, *Reise durch Island*, I, 18.

[26] A sample of this Swedish calendar is preserved in the Bodleian Library at Oxford University.

[27] *Gísla*, 63.

[28] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 583.

Use of Runes for Recording Literature

to some extent the runes were employed for recording literature. There is, however, no justification for the conclusion that any considerable part of the literature of the North was ever committed to runes; and it is quite clear that in heathen times no idea existed of gathering such literary runes as were to be found at any given time in order to form a library and preserve the intellectual treasures for future generations. The literary records were made for merely temporary purposes, and probably only a few of the shorter poems and songs were ever wrought in runic characters. The great proportion of the literary compositions which have come down to us, together with a probably much larger amount which disappeared before the opening of the modern age, was undoubtedly preserved only in the memories of the ancients and handed down by word of mouth from each generation to the succeeding one.

CHAPTER XX

LEARNING IN GENERAL; SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE; ART

Middling wise should every man be, never over-wise. Those who know many things fairly lead the happiest life.

The Guest's Wisdom.

General Intelligence of the Scandinavians

Though by the close of the eighth century the Scandinavians had scarcely reached the threshold of civilization, in the sense in which the word is usually understood, they were by no means an ignorant people. It is true that they lacked a knowledge of reading and writing, but they were not so handicapped as would seem at first glance; for this was not a bookish age in Europe, and the great bulk of the population in the more cultured South was dependent for its enlightenment less upon schools and books than upon life itself; they learned by living and observing. In this regard the Northmen were not backward. Indeed, it may well be questioned whether any people of western Europe possessed a higher average of intelligence than they, or a larger stock of accurate information; for no other European people traveled as extensively as did they. Furthermore, all Scandinavians, whether they journeyed abroad or remained at home, entertained an unusually lively curiosity regarding what was going on in the world; the usual question put to a visitor—as is still the case in out-of-the-way places—was, "What is the news?" Thus those who remained at home learned from those who roamed. At the thing meetings and religious gatherings, at markets and fairs, at banquets and other social assemblies, the

recently-returned wanderer from foreign lands was always certain of a welcome and an audience to which he could narrate his adventures and tell of the strange and new things which he had observed.[1]

Geographical Knowledge

The Northmen of the early Middle Ages were undoubtedly better versed in geographical knowledge than any other people of contemporary Europe, and their knowledge was acquired largely at first hand, through viking- and merchant-voyages, but also through expeditions planned for the definite purpose of exploration and discovery. The feats of the most daring of the explorers "give the outlines of a picture unmatched in the story of medieval geography."[2] Here and there in the literary sources of the time are bits of descriptive geography, generally given in an incidental manner in a saga of adventure; but a more ambitious and comprehensive description of the whole of Europe is to be found at the opening of the chapter on mythology in the *Heimskringla Saga*.[3] Much of the real geographic knowledge possessed by the Northmen was, it is true, distorted by misinformation and adulterated by accounts of mythical monsters and other superstitious elements; but this sort of thing characterized all learning of the time, and persisted for many centuries afterward.

History

Regarding the history of foreign lands, the Northmen were completely ignorant, as was to be expected of a people who knew their own past only through oral tradition. And their historical sagas, like their geography, was more or less colored by the supernatural.

[1] Petersen, *Gammel-Nordiske Geografi*, 52, *passim*.
[2] Beazley, C. Raymond, *The Dawn of Modern Geography*, II, 3.
[3] *Ibid.*, 23–24.

In their practical knowledge of the sciences they were far behind their neighbors to the south; and their insight into scientific theory was more limited still. But their mental equipment was sufficient for their needs at a given time; and as these needs grew they drew upon the culture of the Roman world to supply the lack.

Scientific Knowledge

They were ignorant of the definite movements of even the most conspicuous stars and constellations, but they had names for them and made use of the lode star and the sun in their travels upon land and sea; the compass was also unknown to them, as to the remainder of Europe, but they divided the circle of the horizon into eight different parts, for the purpose of indicating direction.

Astronomy

Time, they determined at night in fair weather by the position of the Pleiades—called "the Star"—above the horizon, and during the day by the position of the sun and by the tides. They divided night into three parts—midnight, and the periods preceding and following. The traditional fractions into which the day was separated took the place of the hours of modern times and were eight in number. *Ris-mál* (rising time), or *miðr-mál* (middle-morning), came at about six o'clock in the morning; *dag-mál* (day-meal, because breakfast was eaten then), at eight or nine; *há-degi* (high day), at about twelve; *mið-mundi* (the middle, so called because it was the period when the sun was midway between high-day and *nón*), about half past one; *nón* (nones, or evening), about three o'clock; *miðr-aptan* (mid-eve), about six; *nátt-mál* (night meal), about nine in the evening.

Determination of Time

The Northman of the pre-Christian period reckoned

time by nights[4] and by winters. Just what was the nature of the calendar before his contact with the South is not quite clear, but it seems fairly evident that at this early time the week consisted of five nights, and was, therefore, called a *fimt*.[5] All of the months were of equal length, and consisted of six weeks, or thirty days. Twelve months made up the year originally; but in order to have the calendar- and solar-years more exactly coincide, four extra nights called *auka-naettr* (eke nights), were added to the third summer month. This system was in use during the first part of the Viking Age. After the middle of the tenth century, however, when the calendar year was far behind the solar year, a whole week was added to the end of the third summer month, and was known as *sumarauki*, or summer eke.[6] After the introduction of Christianity the Icelandic calendar was made to harmonize with the Julian calendar, and the year was "eked" out by the addition of a week every sixth or seventh summer.

The Calendar

The year consisted of two main divisions, winter and summer. Springtime (*vár*) and autumn, or harvest (*haust*), were noted, but these were mere transition periods without definite limits, for there appears to have been no real understanding of the phenomena of the equinoxes. Winter, which began about October fourteenth, opened the year, and the six months of summer began about April fourteenth. Summer and winter were divided into two parts, each ninety days long, except the second half of summer, the dividing points being Mid Winter (*Miðvetr*), which came in heathen time about the middle of January,

The Seasons

[4] A vestige of this old practice is seen in the English "fortnight."

[5] Munch, P. A., *Om vore Forfaedres aeldste Tidsregning, Primstaven og Maerkedagene*, 17, 20.

[6] Brate, Erik, *Nordens äldre Tidsräkring*, 18.

and Mid Summer (*Miðsumar*), which came about the middle of July.[7]

The months in the old calendar were named as follows: winter months—*Gormánuðr* (so called for the winter slaughtering of beasts), beginning, as already stated, about the middle of October; *Frer* (frost); *Jól* (Yule), or *Hrut* (ram); *Thorri* (the month of ebbing winter); *Góa; Einmánuðr* (single month); summer months—*Gaukmánuðr* (cuckoo month); *Skerpla,* or *Stekktid* (thus known from *stekkr,* a fold in which the lambs were weaned at this time of year); *Sólmánuðr* (sun month), or *Selmánuðr* (sel month, so called because at this time the milk cows were taken to the *sel,* or mountain dairy), which lasted thirty-four days, for it included the "eke nights"; *Miðsumar,* or *Heyannir* (hay-making time); *Tvimanuðr* (double month); *Haustmánuðr* (harvest month).[8] Some of these ancient names for the months are still employed in Iceland. **The Months**

In addition to the use of the months, the ancient Scandinavians also frequently indicated time within the year by reference to the great holidays. Thus, an event was said to have taken place a certain number of weeks before or after Yule or Mid Summer.

What were the names of the days of the *fimt* there is no way of determining. The *fimt* gave way, however, to the seven-day division at an early date; how early is not known, but the week was in use in the tenth century. And with it came the usual Teutonic names for the first six days—*Sunnudagr, Mánadagr, Týsdagr, Odinsdagr, Thorsdagr, Frjádagr;* but the last day was known as *Laugrdagr*—bathing or scrubbing **The Week**

[7] *Ibid.*
[8] *Ibid.*

day—a name peculiar to the Scandinavian countries.

In addition to the changes already mentioned, the adoption of Christianity resulted in the placing of the *Jól* festival period of heathen times three weeks earlier, and transforming it into the modern Yule, or Christmas.

Of mathematics the Scandinavians possessed but an elementary knowledge, such as their needs demanded.

Mathematics

Like most early peoples, they had a practical comprehension of certain simple principles of geometry, such as enabled them accurately to measure angles and divide circles in connection with their work in wood and metals. In arithmetic, because of commercial interests, they were further along; but their system was crude and clumsy to an interesting degree. As the Northmen were possessed of a fair numeral vocabulary, they could count up into the hundreds. It is very questionable, however, whether even long after their first contact with the South the word thousand (*Þúsand*), though in popular use, meant to them more than merely a large number. The decimal hundred was introduced into the North with Christianity, but for a long time its use was limited to ecclesiastics and scholars, for the hundred regularly employed in the ancient time was the duodecimal, or long hundred. Counting was done by using tens or this long hundred as factors, as, "ten hundreds," "two ten hundreds," "seven ten hundreds," "twelve ten hundreds." For counting smaller and more definite numbers a curious method was employed because of the absence from the Scandinavian vocabulary of indeclinable numeral adjectives from twenty to one hundred; and this method is still in use in some of the country districts of the North. Thirty-six was called "three tens and six"; forty-five, "half the fifth ten"; "one short of four tens," was one way of saying thirty-nine; "one

winter of the sixth ten'' meant fifty-one years; and so on. That they made use of all of the fundamental arithmetical processes and could handle fractions and reckon interest is quite evident from their business transactions. The systems of currency and weights and measures employed in connection with such enterprises have been described.[9]

Medicine

The chemical knowledge of the Northmen was developed in connection with their practice of healing; but medical science was, as yet, in but a very elementary stage, and much of superstition was mixed with little scientific practice. People wore healing or ''lucky'' stones about their necks to prevent sickness, and had them placed in the hilts of their swords, for it was believed that rubbing wounds with them would result in rapid healing.[10] Much trust was placed also in the effectiveness of special magical runes,[11] formulae, and philtres. There were runes for various kinds of illnesses, including *bjarg rúnar* for aiding women at childbirth. Charms or spells wrought by witches or wizards were believed effective in both the cause and cure of sickness and suffering. And in parts of Scandinavia those afflicted with boils, ringworm, and other similar surface maladies still resort to persons claiming to possess occult power.

Though all of the physicians of the time perhaps relied to a greater or less degree upon the superstitious practices mentioned, they also employed many healing herbs for internal treatment as well as for the preparation of salves to be used upon the numberless wounds calling for attention in those battling days.[12] And by various

[9] See above, pp. 225–227, 233.
[10] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 334.
[11] *Egils Saga Skalagrimssonar*, 241–242.
[12] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 385–388.

methods they determined the depth of wounds. A clever device used for this purpose is mentioned in one of the sagas. The physician, uncertain whether a deep cut had penetrated the bowels or not, sniffed at the mouth of the wound after requiring her patient to drink a strong broth made from leeks.[13]

Surgery

Men as well as women were skilled in the care of wounds; and it is probable that most of the surgical operations were performed by men; but there is no reason to believe that there was a class of professional surgeons, as seems to have been true in the case of physicians.[14] The equipment of the person who practiced surgery was most commonly a saw and a knife, a pair of tweezers, and a needle, threaded generally with the sinews of animals. Wounds were trimmed and sewed up, even reopened and the work repeated if the results were unsatisfactory; broken bones were set and splinted; dislocated joints were put back into place; and, when necessary, parts were amputated, and missing limbs were replaced by ones made of wood.[15]

Artistic Ability of the Northmen

Even as far back as the New Stone Age, the Scandinavians showed real artistic ability, as is proved by the graceful forms and fine symmetry of the implements and weapons surviving from that time; and the viking period of thousands of years later showed a no less keen love for the beautiful. The fact that the taste of this later age demanded that virtually everything be decorated resulted in a greatly varied exhibition of artistic talent, many samples of which have fortunately been pre-

[13] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 742.

[14] *Ibid.*, I, 185; II, 552, 721.

[15] *Ibid.*, II, 100, 130; *Grettis Saga Asmundarsonar*, 5; *Gísla Saga Surssonar*, 7.

served, particularly through objects buried with the dead. The most usual samples of the artistic talent of the old Northmen are in the form of metal work, carving in wood, stone, bone, and ivory, painting, and decorative weaving and embroidery.

Character of Decoration

The Northern smiths ornamented not only the gold and silver parts of weapons and utensils with rich chasings, sometimes set with precious stones, but also took similar pains with objects made from bronze. In their jewelry—most of which was made from bronze and silver during this age—surfaces exposed to the eye were almost never left plain. As a rule, geometrical or animal and bird forms appeared in the designs; but the hammer of Thor and the cross of Frey were also favorite motifs. The spirit of Gothic art is reflected in the figures; all of them show strength and solidity, and all have a peculiar barbaric extravagance and charm. The decorations on wood, metal, and stone are in moderately high relief; and the motifs chosen are often adapted to the space to be filled by means of twisting and looping or some other variety of distortion. This is true not only of animal and bird forms, but also of human beings; and the result is usually an assemblage of grotesque and fantastic figures possessing, however, a strong fascination. The idea of employing animal figures for decoration was, in all probability, borrowed by the Scandinavians, perhaps from the Irish Celts; but it is likely that some Oriental influence also played upon these designs.[16] Yet it was not a slavish borrowing, for the artists of the North worked over and enriched the designs by placing upon them the stamp of their Scandinavian individuality.

[16] Bugge, *Norges Historie*, vol. I, pt. I, 250; Arne, T. J., "Sveriges Forbindelser med Österi under Vikingatiden," in *Kunglig Vitterhets Historie*, VI, 66; Müller, *Vor Oldtid*, 614–628.

Ideas for decoration also came directly from the Orient, particularly by means of coins from the Byzantine Empire and beyond. These were used primarily for the designs in jewelry.

Though a fair sort of native pottery was made from clay, so far as is known, no art work in this material worthy of consideration existed. Wood-carving took its place. Even members of the royalty engaged in this art, and women were skilled in it as well as men. Much carving in the round was done in wood, but very little of it has survived. Judging, however, from the carvings in relief which have come down to us, this "wooden sculpture" was of high quality. Perhaps the most common use for the round carving was for figure heads for ships, and similar figures for the decoration of houses. This was also probably the coarsest work of the kind. Many objects served as models, including human beings. The best work was doubtless found in the temples, in the shape of idols; for the carvers wrought under the inspiration of religion; and the images were not only carved with the best skill of the worker, but often the surfaces were covered with platings of precious metals and set with decorative stones.

Wood-Carving

A few examples of fancy weaving and embroidery have survived from ancient times, which show real beauty of color and design. The sagas indicate also that the women of the North paid much attention to the decoration of textile materials by means of embroidery, using it not only on clothing, but also on banners, sails, and hangings for beds and walls. Perhaps the Bayeux Tapestry, though wrought in Normandy, may be taken as an example of Scandinavian skill in this line.

Weaving and Embroidery

Fig. 43. Elaborate Carving on a Sledge Shaft. (From prospectus of book on the Oseberg discoveries to be published by the Norwegian government)

Fig. 44. Pictorial Stone from the Island of Gotland. (From Bugge's *Norges Historie*)

The ancient North developed a real pictorial art, in quality not far behind that displayed by the remainder of contemporary Western Europe. This was shown in the embroidered hangings already mentioned, which brightened the homes of the rich, and the wall paintings which took their place in those of the humbler classes—forms of decorations which are still used in peasant homes to-day. Such hangings were less frequently covered with geometrical figures or grotesque animal forms than with serious pictures illustrating scenes from the stories of the gods or ancient heroes, or the adventures and exploits of the master of the house himself. Sometimes these pictures were of wood carved in relief.

Pictorial Art

A more unique class of pictorial work was stone carving, which was especially well developed in the island of Gotland. Such stones were very similar to some of the more elaborate rune stones used as grave marks and monuments, which frequently—especially in Gotland—also show decorative designs.[17] The former bear elaborate pictures carved in outline or flat relief representing scenes from the hero tales and myths, sometimes accompanied by explanatory runes and many of them display much beauty of conception (Fig. 44).

Pictorial Stones

The wooden carvings in bas-relief were at times painted in bright colors; and the stone artist's work was also touched up with paint. In the case of the latter, the color, often red, was generally spread upon the background only, for the purpose of making the raised figures stand out.[18]

How much attempt at human portraiture was made by

[17] See below, pp. 424–425.

[18] Pipping, *Om Runinskrifterna på de Nyfunna Ardre-Stenerna.*

Human Portraiture

the art of the time is very difficult to say, but that there was some is evidenced by the sagas. Perhaps some of the instances mentioned in these records were mere caricatures, labeled by means of runes, or made recognizable through the exaggeration, pictorially, of some well known physical characteristic; for in some cases they were done for the express purpose of rousing resentment in the original.[19] But other human representations were made with the aim of having the likenesses of loved ones always at hand; and careful effort was made to have these delineations as true to life as the skill of the artist would permit. An Icelander, for instance, delineated the likeness of his beloved Astrid upon his bedroom wall.[20] Such portraits were probably in the form of carved bas-reliefs, charcoal drawings, and oil paintings. Whether portrait statues and busts carved from wood were often attempted is not evident; but they were perhaps occasionally made, in view of the abundant practice which the artists had in representing human features through carving the figures of their gods, whom they made in their own images.

[19] *Egils Saga Skalagrimssonar*, 188; *Origines Islandicae*, I, 180.
[20] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 427.

CHAPTER XXI

RELIGION: OBJECTS OF WORSHIP

Thorwolf . . . was a great sacrificer, and he put his trust in Thor. He came to Iceland by reason of the oppression of King Harold, and sailed to the south of the country. But when he came west of Broadfirth, he cast his porch pillars overboard, whereon Thor was carven, saying as he did so that Thor would go ashore where he wished Thorwolf to settle, and promising to hallow to Thor all his settlement and call it after him.

Book of Settlements.

Nature Worship

Like all peoples at an early stage of development, the Northmen of prehistoric times were primarily nature-worshippers; they feared, tried to propitiate, and to win over to their side, the natural forces about them which their untutored minds could not comprehend. And so firmly established and dominating did this religion become in the North before the dawn of history there that long after certain phases of it had developed into the belief in general and more anthropomorphic deities, there persisted,—contemporaneous with the worship of the latter, but now playing a minor part,—a nature cult in its most primitive aspects. This was the state of affairs in the Viking Age, particularly during the early part of it. Bodies of water, hills, stones, and groves were then objects of devotion. Thorstan, an Icelander mentioned in the ancient records, held a waterfall in special reverence, and appears to have sacrificed to it all food left from the table.[1] Another Icelander made offerings to a grove. In Sweden close beside the great temple at Uppsala there stood an exceed-

[1] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 212.

ingly famous sacred grove to which extensive sacrifices were also made. Thorwolf of Iceland held a certain hill in "such reverence that no man might pray towards it unwashed, and there might be no destruction of man or beast on this hill. He believed that when he and his kinsmen died they should go into the hill."[2] There is no doubt, furthermore, that in early times the Scandinavians worshipped the sun, for numerous traces of a once-powerful sun-cult have survived in the North in peasant customs down to the present, just as has evidence of former worship of trees and stones. Montelius even believes that the greatest deities of the viking period were all originally sun-gods.[3] But they had lost practically all evidence of such origin by the beginning of the Middle Ages, and only here and there in the more remote parts of the land were there lingering vestiges of direct sun-worship.[4]

Animal-Worship

Animal-worship was an important element in the religion of Scandinavia during early times, and, though rare in the Viking Age, it was not entirely extinct even then, for individual animals—such as horses, cows, and pigs—were objects of worship by certain Northmen.[5] Such a cult was bound quite closely with the worship of Frey; and the prominence given to the boar's head at the Yule feasts even in modern times in various lands which have felt Scandinavian influence is merely a harking back through the worship of the boar as an attribute of the god of fruitfulness to the independent worship of the animal itself.[6]

[2] *Ibid.*, 24.

[3] Montelius, Oscar, "Midvinterns Solfest," in *Svenska Fornminnesföreningens Tidskrift*, vol. 9, no. 25, pp, 68–77.

[4] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 24.

[5] Keyser, R., *Nordmaendenes Religionsforfatning i Hedendommen*, 109–110.

[6] *Rosén*, "Freykult och Dyrkult," in *Fornvännen*, 1913, pp. 213–245.

There is ample evidence that during the period under study human beings were occasionally worshipped after death. In Iceland, we are told, sacrifices were offered to Grim after he died "because of the love men bore him."[7] Grim was merely a leader of his community. Kings and great military chieftains were perhaps more frequently and more generally deified. There are two examples of this king-cult to be found in the ancient records. A special temple was consecrated to a certain King Eric of Sweden after death, with priests to offer sacrifice to him;[8] and King Olaf Gudrödsson of Vestfold, Norway, was worshipped upon his burial mound by his subjects, who called him "Geirstadaálfi"[9] for the place in which he lived.[10] Sacrifice to mounds was, in fact, so common and so persistent that after the introduction of Christianity laws were passed in some parts prohibiting it.[11] Probably in all cases the worship connected with artificial mounds, as opposed to natural hills, was originally in honor of deified human beings buried within; but with the passage of time the original motive was in many cases lost and the pagan Scandinavians regarded the mound itself as sacred and offered sacrifice to it, or to its spirit.

Worship of Human Beings after Death

Ancestor-worship was doubtless more common than deification of men of prominence by a community or a province; for the cult of ancestors was deeply imbedded in the religion of the Northern people. Some of the gods who received homage from all Scandinavians during the Viking Age

The Cult of Ancestors

[7] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 30.
[8] Adam of Bremen, 195.
[9] "Alf" appears to have been here used in the sense of "spirit."
[10] Keyser, *Nordmaendenes Religionsforfatning i Hedendommen*, 108–109.
[11] *Ibid.*, 110.

perhaps began their divine careers as "dead ancestors" reverenced by but a small group of kindred;[12] more frequently, however, when the passage of time caused the blood ties with a given family to be forgotten, the ancestors remained the guardian spirits or angels of the family, watching over its members and sharing their hopes and fears. But in those ancient days of keen memories the dead were doubtless much longer kept in mind as distinct personalities than now, and, later, when deified, they continued for many generations to shape the careers of the living. The wishes of the dead and their ideals, in general, helped maintain the family standards.[13] While their personalities were still remembered by kindred, they were worshipped individually, but when forgotten, collective worship was substituted, and their spirits were known by the general names of *dísir*,[14] or *álfar*.[15] The two words seem to have been almost interchangeable, except that the dísir were regarded as *female* guardian angels, which forces the conclusion that in their worship the tie of family was largely forgotten. This was perhaps also often true in the worship of álfar, or elves. There seems some basis for the belief that the worship of the spirits of more or less forgotten ancestors under the name of "elves" had a stronger hold in Sweden than elsewhere. Frey, a favorite god of the Swedes, was

[12] Sephton, J., *Thor and his Sway*, 10.

[13] *Ibid.*, 7.

[14] It is interesting to note that one meaning of the word "*dís*" is "sister."

[15] One phase of ancestor-worship, bordering upon reincarnation, of which Grönbech makes considerable (*Vor Folkaet i Oldtiden*, II, 124–125) is the ancient Scandinavian system of naming children for dead relatives which still persists in the more remote parts of Scandinavia. The dead—to use a present-day phrase—were "called up" by having their names given to new-born children; and it was—and, in some parts, still is—believed that the child would partake of the qualities of the one for whom he was named; that the spirit of the dead would in some way live in the child.

believed to be the god of the elves, who, however, were thought to dwell in Alfheimar, the fairyland of the Northmen.[16] Thus, Frey must have been the patron of ancestral spirits transformed by the passage of time into good fairies.

The most usual time for sacrificial feasts and other religious ceremonies in honor of the dead was midwinter, when the nights were longest, for it was believed that such spirits preferred darkness, and during the period of long nights they were thought to incline more to come forth and associate with mankind.[17]

Land Spirits

Probably related to the good elves, who watched over individuals and aided them, were the land spirits, but whether or not these beings were actually worshipped is not clear, though it is certain that the Icelanders took great care not to offend them. What is perhaps the most remarkable Scandinavian law surviving from the heathen period has this end in view. It stands at the very beginning of the ancient Icelandic collection called *Grágás*, and is a prohibition against the use of figure-heads on ships; or, if these figures are used, the law adds, they must be removed before the vessel comes within sight of land, lest the land spirits be frightened by them. The land spirits were believed—at least in Iceland—to have in their charge the welfare of whole regions, but they were quite capable of showing a preference for certain inhabitants. Those whom they selected for their special favor they appear to have followed about and aided, to the temporary exclusion of other inhabitants of the territory over which they watched. These spirits were not usually

[16] There even now exists among the Scandinavian peasants, as Selma Lagerlöf has pointed out in her writings, a belief in elves, especially in evil ones.

[17] Feilberg, H. F., *Jul*, 96.

visible to ordinary mortals, but persons gifted with second sight were able to follow their movements. For instance, an Icelandic woman possessed of clairvoyant power reported that she saw all of the land spirits follow Buck-Beorn when he went to the meeting of the thing; and when his brothers, Thorstan and Thord, went hunting and fishing they were accompanied by the same invisible companions.[18]

The Gods

It is, however, in the qualities of the great anthropomorphic gods and the attitude of the Northmen towards these deities that the most characteristic features of the ancient religion of Scandinavia are revealed. During the long centuries of struggle with a bleak climate and an unfriendly environment, the inhabitants of the North became differentiated from the remainder of the far-extended Teutonic family —to some degree in appearance, but more in mental outlook; and thus the gods whom they had once worshipped in common with the other members of their racial group underwent a transformation; for the Northmen modified their deities to meet the needs and reflect the ideals which developed from life in the Far North. Like the men who created them, the divinities were crude in a primitive way, and even grotesque; but they were also wholesome, virile, and moral. Since divine, they were mightier than their creators, but these gods of a courageous and independent-spirited people were no tyrants; they were friends whose aid might be secured when human resources failed, if they were shown proper honor, and suitable sacrifices were offered them. And if one god unjustly failed him, the worshipper was quite capable of turning to another, and, perhaps, rival, deity for help.

[18] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 195.

The ancient Scandinavian writings mention twelve chief gods, but it is questionable whether the number of gods recognized as particularly powerful was ever so definitely fixed, and whether it was absolutely uniform all over the North.[19] Thor, Odin, Frey, Njörd, Tyr, and Bragi, however, seem to have been deities of power in all parts of Scandinavia at one time or another; while Loki, Balder, Heimdall, Hoene, and Uller were probably of late origin or underwent transformation early in the historic period and were perhaps never regarded as of general moment, for it is primarily through Scandinavian mythology—and not through the records of the actual religious life of the Scandinavians—that we learn of them. Likewise, the two most oft-named goddesses, Frigg and Freyia, seem to have played but little part in the actual lives of the people, and are heard of usually only in connection with their myths. As already stated, some of these deities, particularly the greatest and most revered, were originally nature gods, but with the passage of time their original characteristics were obscured, or utterly lost, and others were assumed.

Thor, popularly known as "the Thunderer," appears to have been in his earliest functions the weather god; and, as such, he was of special importance to the sea-faring Northmen. One trace of this origin the deity never lost; by means of his mighty hammer he waged tireless warfare against the ice and frost giants, without which friendly service, gods as well as mankind would have perished from the earth. More than any other of the gods whose personalities stand out clearly, Thor was representative of the early Scandinavian type. He won his way by physical strength. He was sparing with words but ready with blows, hot tem-

Thor

[19] Craigie, W. A., *The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*, 32.

pered and fearless. Well-meaning, blunt, and honest, he was likely to be deceived because of his lack of sophistication.

Throughout the early part of the Viking Age, Thor seems to have been the most popular god of the whole North. Later, Odin displaced him to some extent in Denmark and Sweden, but even here the Thunderer remained the favorite deity of the common man; and in Norway and Iceland he continued to be the one to whom all most generally looked for aid. Thoroughly democratic, Thor was the staunch friend and ready helper of low and high alike. Towards him people felt more of comradeship than towards any other of the deities, and depended more upon him. This is made very clear in the sagas. One instance is Thoralf of Norway, who, we are told, was a "great friend" of Thor. After this chieftain quarreled with King Harold he consulted his favorite deity to learn whether it were best to make terms with the ambitious sovereign or to leave the country. The oracle advised him to depart to Iceland, and this Thoralf decided to do, taking with him most of the timber from the temple of Thor as well as some of the earth from beneath the pedestal on which the image of the deity had stood. Upon approaching Iceland, he threw overboard the wooden pillars on which was carved the image of his "loving friend," in order that his patron might direct him to a favorable landing place.[20]

Men also showed their attachment to this god by naming their children for him and dedicating them to his service. Among the eight hundred men and three hundred women constituting the early settlers of Iceland mentioned in the *Landnámabók* are to be found thirty different men's names and twenty-one different women's

[20] *Ibid.*, 7.

names containing the name Thor.[21] This far exceeds any similar record for any other god.

Still another manner of showing allegiance to Thor, which perhaps rose towards the end of the viking era as a result of Christian influence, was the use of inscriptions in runes upon the tomb stones commending the departed to the care of the Thunder god. But more interesting and more general was the role of the hammer, Thor's symbol. This was used upon tomb stones, and, as has been elsewhere stated, as a decorative motif in jewelry, worn most frequently perhaps in the form of pendants or charms. The sign of the hammer, or the hammer itself, was employed for consecrating the Scandinavian bride, and also probably in connection with the final rites for the dead.[22] This striking parallel between the use of the Christian cross and the heathen hammer is probably a result of the fact that the Northmen, after coming in contact with Christianity in the South, came to think of Thor as corresponding to Christ; both were helpers and friends to whom man turned in time of need, regardless of the character of the need.[23]

Odin

Odin was a much younger deity than Thor, or was an ancient god modified and brought up to date; for he reflected well the most obvious characteristics of the viking heroes. Primarily a war god, he came into prominence in consequence of the great emphasis placed upon military activities. And yet he did not have the monopoly of matters connected with warfare, for to Thor many men continued to turn for aid in fighting, as for other things. A true representative of the aristocratic Viking Age, Odin was the friend

[21] Petersen, Henry, *Om Nordboernes Gudedyrkelse og Gudetro i Hedenold*, 41.

[22] *Ibid.*, 58. [23] Craigie, *Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*, 11–12.

of warriors and kings, and, like them, he used the modern spear in battle, in contrast to Thor's primitive hammer. While the frank and democratic Thor gained his ends by dint of pure physical strength, Odin succeeded by exercising the craft and cunning which characterized the viking warrior. Thor drank home-brewed ale, but Odin, like the rich sea-kings, partook of imported wine.[24] Whereas Thor was believed by some to care for only the souls of the humble thralls, Odin had special supervision over the proud warriors. "To some he gave victory, and some he invited to himself, and either lot was thought good;"[25] for those who fell in battle went to live with the warrior god in Valhalla, where they enjoyed unlimited opportunity for glorious military achievement.

In addition to his functions as war god, Odin was, appropriately, the one who presided over wisdom and cunning, and over runes and poetry; for the two latter were popularly believed to be closely associated with supernatural power. His love for the deep, mysterious, and unfathomable things of creation had induced this deity to sacrifice one eye to Mimir's fountain of wisdom and knowledge, in exchange for the secrets of the universe.

In the mythology of the late heathen age Odin is represented as the hero-ancestor of the Scandinavian people, who led them into their present home-land. The stories of the gods also make him the supreme deity, or All Father; and represent Thor as his son. Such an exaltation of the one-eyed god was doubtless due to the influence of the Christian South. However, in spite of the predominant position given to the Father God in Northern *mythology,* and in spite of the rapid growth of the

[24] *Ibid.*, 22.
[25] *Ibid.*, 14, 15.

Odin cult in Denmark and Sweden during the Viking Age, he never really held more than second place in the *worship* of the North. Even in Denmark and Sweden, the runestones much more frequently bear the name of Thor, the friend, than of Odin, the All Father; and in Denmark, in particular, the Thunderer is given distinctly more prominence in place-names than Odin, which indicates the long-, well-established position of the former. And there is no clear evidence in the historical sources of a general worship of this god in either Norway or Iceland. Most of the references to him from this western part of Scandinavia are by the skalds, and these furnish no indication of his popular support, since he was the favorite god of the poets.[26] Furthermore, in no saga is there mention of any temple, image, or special priest of Odin in any part of Iceland.[27] And not one person mentioned in *Landnámabók* is named in honor of the Father God of Northern mythology.[28]

Frey was also much revered in the North. Though he occupies a far humbler place in Scandinavian mythology than Odin, it is not improbable that he was more generally worshipped than the latter. While reputed a special favorite in Sweden,[29] he was really quite popular throughout Scandinavia. In Iceland there were priests of Frey,[30] and among the first settlers of the island were men and women named for him.[31] As lord of wealth and fruitfulness, he ruled over the rain and sunshine and brought good crops; and at the great religious festivals it was customary to drink

Frey

[26] *Ibid.*, 18–19.
[27] *Ibid.*, 19.
[28] Petersen, *Gudedyrkelse og Gudetro*, 41.
[29] Feilberg, *Jul*, 89.
[30] Craigie, *Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*, 25.
[31] Petersen, *Gudedyrkelse og Gudetro*, 41.

to him for peace and plenty. By some, he was even more beloved than Thor, and towards him men felt the affection and intimacy commonly displayed towards the Thunderer. At times, his worshippers divided up their possessions with him. Horses made a particularly acceptable gift, but, as god of fertility, Frey was fond of all kinds of animals.[32]

The other great gods of the North are more shadowy figures, perhaps partly because they were less commonly worshipped, but also probably, in some cases, merely as a result of the fact that the sources of our information do not happen to bestow much attention on them. This latter reason seems to apply particularly to Njörd, closely identified in worship with Frey, his son. To Njörd, as to Frey, the Northmen drank the banqueting horn for peace and plenty. And in the old heathen form of oath taken by suitors and others at the popular assemblies the deities invoked were commonly "Frey and Njörd and the Almighty God"—probably Thor. Though the first two were both gods of prosperity, Frey was more especially the one who brought plenty through abundant harvests, while Njörd ruled over traffic and brought wealth thereby. Hence, the latter was apparently the special patron of the merchant, and upon him the voyager called to still the waves or swell the sails, to suit the needs of the trader. As ruler of the sea, Njörd came also to be the deity to whom the fisherman prayed. He was, moreover, the god of wealth in general, the Crœsus of Scandinavian mythology. "Rich as Njörd" was a common simile in Iceland, for this deity was believed to possess vast amounts of land and treasure, which he might be induced to be-

Njörd

[32] Craigie, *Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*, 26; Rosén, Helge, "Freykult och Dyrkult," in *Fornvännen*, 1913, pp. 213–245.

stow upon others if they were so fortunate as to win his special favor.[33]

Tyr

The worship of Tyr, the god of battle, was evidently, even in the early part of the viking period, distinctly in a state of decline in Scandinavia, though, centuries before, Tacitus had likened him to the mighty Mars of the Romans. In eastern Scandinavia he had been largely supplanted by Odin, while it seems likely that in the western part the place assumed by Thor as a general god caused Tyr to be thrust into obscurity. He, however, received some attention, and it was good for men of valor to call upon him; for, though possessed of but one arm, he was the "bravest and stoutest-hearted of the gods" and had a great share in deciding the victory in battle.[34]

Bragi

Bragi, the son of Odin and god of wisdom, poetry, and eloquence, appears to have been a distinctly Scandinavian deity, for there is no evidence that he was known to the other Teutonic peoples. To what extent he was actually worshipped is not clear, but it is probable that as god of poetry he was more regarded in Norway and Iceland while his father received more recognition in Denmark and Sweden. In any case, the Northmen commonly drank to Bragi at sacrificial feasts and made vows to perform some great deed worthy to be immortalized in verse.

Loki

Loki was a being of mixed origin, half giant and half god, and was the mischief-maker among the Northern deities, with whom he was regularly associated. Like Bragi, Loki appears to have been peculiar to the Scandinavian religion, but there is no doubt that his characteristics were largely developed

[33] Craigie, *Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*, 28–29.
[34] *Ibid.*, 30.

through the transforming influence of the Satan of Christian belief.[35] It is even possible that this giant-god was wholly the creation of the late Viking Age and originated as the incarnation of evil—an Oriental idea adapted by the Scandinavian mind.

Balder

Equally peculiar to the Northern religion was Balder, the son of Odin and the noblest of all of the gods; but he perhaps shows most markedly the influence of Christianity upon the pagan religion of the Northland; for, as the incarnation of good, he clearly reflects the virtues of the "White Christ." He was the peace-maker and was the most beautiful and most lovable of all of the gods.

Heimdal

Heimdal, too, was known only in the North and was probably the product of Christianity working upon a heathen background. He was the watchful keeper of the gates of heaven and of the rainbow bridge called Bifrost. The most effective vigilance characterized him, for nothing escaped his notice. He slept less than a bird, but could see in his sleep as well as in the dark, and could hear the grass grow and even the wool grow on the sheep's back. Part of his equipment was Gjallar, the magic horn with which he would summon the gods upon the day of judgment.

Hoene and Uller

Two of the shadowy deities about whom little is known are Hoene, the long-legged god who was associated with the crane, and presided over oozy, swampy districts, and Uller, the god of winter who strode over snow-clad hill and dale upon skees. The very brief mention made in Northern literature of these two was probably due to the fact that their worship had virtually died out before the dawn of Scandinavian history, though it is not impossible that they

[35] Bugge, *Norges Historie*, vol. I, pt. I, 188.

were of recent origin and that their development was arrested by the introduction of Christian ideas. It is evident, however, that special gods like these, of a regional or seasonal nature, could never attain to the prominence of the god of war, or of Thor, the special friend of man.

Of the various goddesses of whom the ancient writings make mention, Frigg, Freyia, and Idun were perhaps the most prominent. Frigg, wife of Odin, is represented in Northern mythology as the first among the goddesses. She was a fitting mate for the one-eyed god, since she was possessed of great wisdom and was familiar with the fates of all human beings; but she was too discreet and too kind to reveal the future to them. Primarily, she was representative of steady, enduring maternal love, such as she displayed in her devotion to her son, Balder, killed by the mischievous Loki.

Frigg, Freyia, and Idun

Freyia, daughter of Njörd, was, on the other hand, patron of stormy, emotional, romantic affection, and to her all lovers prayed. Her great beauty caused poets to coin figurative expressions making allusion to her. The butterfly, for instance, was known as "Freyia's hen," and gold was called "Freyia's tears," in memory of the tears of pure gold which she shed as she wandered over the world in search of her husband, Oder, whose fondness for travel caused him to leave her. Two of Freyia's most prized possessions were her famous necklace, Brisingamen, and a disguise of falcon feathers which she donned when she went forth on perilous journeys. She shared with her brother, Frey, some of his power as god of abundance; and Odin divided evenly with her the slain on the field of battle. But in spite of the prestige gained from these connections, Freyia ranged below Frigg.

Idun, wife of Bragi, was possessed of great power and was absolutely essential to the happiness and welfare of the whole group of divinities; for she was guardian of the casket containing the magical apples which all of the gods must taste at intervals to prevent youth from passing from them. Failure to do so caused them to shrivel and weaken. Idun is, therefore, looked upon as symbolical of gladness and ever-returning spring.[36]

[36] Mortensen, Karl, *Nordisk Mytologi;* Anderson, *Norse Mythology.*

CHAPTER XXII

RELIGION: PLACES AND METHODS OF WORSHIP

Men also would drink a toast to their kinsmen that had been laid in their barrows, and that was called the "memory toast."

Haakon Saga.

As no priest class existed in the North, worship had a personal, informal phase, as well as a more conventional community aspect: in matters in which only himself was concerned, the Northman met his gods alone; in affairs of general interest he worshipped at stated times in fellowship with others, under the leadership of the chieftain-priest. Because of this more formal, public manifestation of the religion of the North, special places of worship early came into use. The most primitive of these was doubtless the horg (*hörgr*), which consisted merely of a stone altar or cairn standing under the open sky. On it the sacrificial offering was placed. Though largely supplanted by the more pretentious temple by the beginning of the Middle Ages, this crude place of worship was still in use in some parts of Scandinavia at the close of the heathen period.[1] Another simple device, used at least in Sweden, was a portable booth or tabernacle of small dimensions, containing an image of a god, which was carried about from place to place for purposes of worship.[2]

Horgs

Virtually every community, however, had its local temple during the late heathen period; and in certain

1 Keyser, *Nordmaendenes Religionsforfatning i Hedendommen*, 89.
2 "Hörgr," in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary.

parts were found great temples for provincial or national religious assemblies. The most famous of these centers for worship was at Uppsala, in Sweden; Denmark's most famous temple was perhaps the one at Leire, though the temples at Lund (which was then a Danish possession), Ringsted, Viborg, and Odense were also noted.[3] Some of the buildings, particularly those of private origin, were quite small and frail, and could, therefore, be taken down easily and moved; but others were large, pretentious structures as substantial as any of the dwelling houses. As in the case of the latter, the materials used varied according to the country; in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden timber was most commonly employed; in Iceland, turf, or turf and unhewn stone was the rule. When the two materials were combined in the Icelandic temples, a thin layer of turf was alternated with a thick one of stone; often, however, both materials were employed only for the lower part of the walls, turf alone being used for the upper portion.[4] In these temples, turf was most frequently used for the roof also, though wooden roofs were not unknown.[5]

Temples

It is not improbable that in the viking period there were round or oval religious buildings in Scandinavia, since there were houses of the same shape; and it has been suggested that the peculiar rotunda churches, still to be found in different parts of the North, were modeled after round or oval temples of heathen days.[6] But these rounded structures, if they existed, were a survival from a still earlier age, and were not the common form. Most temples were rectangular—though in Iceland, where the

[3] Petersen, *Gudedyrkelse og Gudetro*, 7.
[4] Thümmel, Albert, *Der Germanische Tempel*, 30–33.
[5] *Ibid.*, 70.
[6] Petersen, *Gudedyrkelse og Gudetro*, 22–23.

materials were turf or stone, the corners of the buildings naturally were not sharp—and were built to some extent after the style of the stofa, the living room in the Northman's dwelling house. Frequently they were of large size. Mention is to be found of temples considerably over one hundred feet in length and more than sixty in width. The investigations of Thümmel show that the public temples of Iceland had an average length of nearly one hundred feet, while the private ones were about half

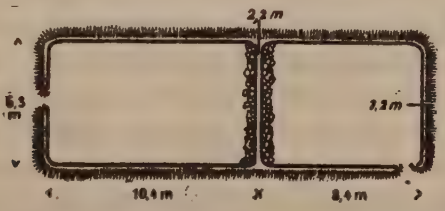


Fig. 45. Ground Plan of an Icelandic Temple. (From Thümmel's *Germanische Tempel.*)

as long. The breadth was from one fourth to one half of the length.[7] It seems likely that in continental Scandinavia where building materials were more easily obtained the temples were frequently larger; but since they were of perishable wood, there is no evidence left to prove this.

The rectangular temples in Iceland—and doubtless in the remaining parts of the North—were divided by a doorless partition into two rooms of unequal size (Fig. 45). The apartments thus formed corresponded roughly to the choir and the nave of the Christian church. The larger room formed the place of assembly in which the worshippers met for their ceremonial feasts, and appears to have been furnished with benches and high seat very

[7] *Der Germanische Tempel*, 44–49, 71.

much like the stofa of the dwelling. The *afhús,* or smaller room was the one in which sacrifices were offered. Here stood the images of the gods upon pedestals, in a half circle; and before them, in the center of the arc, was the stone altar where stood, when not in use, the bowl in which the sacrificial blood was caught, and where lay the holy ring used in the administration of oaths.[8] Upon the altar there burned a fire which was never permitted to go out.[9]

Images of the Gods

The number and character of the images found in the temples differed according to the country and the nature of the place of worship itself. In the chief temples were probably representations of all of the deities of the region or country. These were in the shape of human beings appropriately dressed and equipped, presumably in the fashion of the period, and richly decorated with silver and gold. In the great temple at Uppsala not only were the images thus ornamented, but in the embellishment of the building itself much gold was used.[10] Here, at Uppsala, we are told by Adam of Bremen, were the warrior Odin dressed in a full suit of armor, and the Thunderer bearing his hammer in his hand.[11] Thor was also at times represented as in his chariot. There was such an image in Trondhjem. Here the favorite god, adorned with silver and gold, was seated in a chariot to which were hitched two carved wooden goats mounted on wheels. Silver cords used as reins were attached to the goat's horns.[12] Yet another image of Thor, of unusual size, was described as standing upon a special pedestal or platform built to

[8] Thümmel, *Der Germanische Tempel,* 82–88, *passim.*
[9] *Origines Islandicae,* I, 310.
[10] Adam of Bremen, 194.
[11] *Ibid.*
[12] Craigie, *Religion of Ancient Scandinavia,* 48–49.

be carried out of the image room into the open air where the favorite god would be more accessible to the crowds.[13]

That goddesses as well as gods were represented by images is shown by the statement in a saga that a figure of Thorgerda, an obscure goddess of Iceland, had a great gold ring upon its arm and a wimple, or veil, about its head.[14]

There seems to be no ground for doubting that the representations of the gods carved upon the furniture of dwelling houses and upon the high seat and porch pillars were objects of worship as well as the images found in the temples. They were a sort of household god. The pillar carvings were perhaps not unlike totem poles in general appearance, though of smaller size. Indeed, Professor Alexander Bugge inclines to the view that the images in the temples were also of the nature of these primitive "god posts"; and he questions whether the people—as, Adam of Bremen's informants—who described the heathen images as dressed in clothes had really ever seen these images; and suggests that they may have been describing the statues seen in Christian churches.[15] The evidence of the sagas seems however, quite against the view of Bugge on this point.

In addition to the large images for use in the temple and the home, small figures of the gods made from wood, silver, or ivory, such as could be carried in the wallet or pocket, were used. Their owners probably consulted them for advice as well as carried them for luck.[16]

Though there was no priest class in Scandinavia, each community had its religious leader—called "godi" in

[13] *Ibid.*, 49.
[14] *Njála*, 193.
[15] *Norges Historie*, vol. I, pt. I, 209.
[16] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 126.

Iceland—who was also its political head, as has already been explained. During early days in Iceland, the man who built and owned the temple became its priest; but after the republic was formed a number of chief, or public, temples were created, and men noted for intelligence and just dealing were selected by the Althing to have charge of them. Some such system probably had prevailed in the remainder of Scandinavia for the public temples from a very early time.[17] Throughout the North there were also private temples the builders and owners of which were as a rule their godis; and in many cases these priests probably paid the whole expense of maintenance; but it was perhaps more usual for the attendants at a temple to pay a toll or tax for its support. This was always true in the case of public places of worship.[18] Gifts of land and personal property from pious persons also contributed to the support of the religious establishments.[19] The temple at Uppsala, for example, was particularly well endowed.

The Godi as Priest

Though a person of influence because of his dual office, the godi was never possessed of dangerous power; for there was nothing to prevent any one with sufficient means from erecting a place of worship of his own and exercising the influence of religious leader over all who chose to worship at his temple. There was no compulsion about the matter, and no individual was required even to confine himself to the god-houses of his own country. This is evident from the fact that some early settlers in Iceland made a point of returning to Norway

[17] Chadwick, H. Munro, "The Ancient Teutonic Priesthood," in *Folklore*, XI, 280–283; Craigie, *Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*, 44.

[18] Keyser, *Nordmaendenes Religionsforfatning i Hedendommen*, 96.

[19] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 207.

at intervals to sacrifice at the temples of their kindred there, or at the shrines of their youth.[20] After all, the power of the godi was largely dependent upon his influence as a man—his wealth, bodily strength, fighting qualities, and personal character.

Temple owners and others holding rights of godiship sometimes voluntarily delegated their religious functions to others. Slaves and servants, as representatives of their masters, were occasionally put in charge of these duties; and women, who were probably in most cases relatives of the godi, also sometimes collected the temple taxes, performed sacrifices, and acted the parts of priests in other capacities. Obviously, menials did not exercise the political functions belonging to the godi; and it does not seem likely that the priestesses were given such power.[21]

It was one of the functions of the priest to keep the images of the gods supplied with food and with other offerings. Gifts might also be made to the gods in the temple by private individuals. Great religious gatherings were, in addition, held at special seasons or on occasions of local or national crisis when more extensive religious ceremonies took place in behalf of the group or the nation.

Annual Religious Festivals

Three annual festivals seem to have been held throughout Scandinavia: *Vetrnótt,* Winter Night, about the middle of October, "to greet the winter"; Jól, or *Hökunótt,* held originally about the middle of January, but afterwards altered to correspond with Christmas; and a spring celebration coming about the middle of April, held "to

[20] *Ibid.*, 218.

[21] *Ibid.*, 43, 131; Philpotts, "Temple Administration and Chieftainship in Pre-Christian Norway and Iceland," in *Saga Book*, VIII, 274.

greet the summer.'' [22] Since the year began with Winter Night, the festival held at this time seems to have been largely devoted to Frey to whom sacrifices were offered for a good year.[23] The celebration of Jól was, however, the most important festival period, and at times lasted as long as two weeks. At this gathering sacrifices were offered not only to the great gods, and beakers drunk to them, but particular attention was also paid to the humbler powers who influenced the destinies of mankind. The Northmen took pains to win over the dísir, or guardian spirits already mentioned, as well as various other beings who were supposed to interest themselves in the affairs of mortals at this time of year.[24] But special attention was paid to the spirits of the more recently dead, since it was believed that during the long winter nights ghosts were more likely to wander forth from their burial mounds and visit the living. Hence, it was necessary to gain their good will.[25]

Very little may be learned of the spring celebration, but there is no reason to believe that this differed greatly from the others, except for the seasonal interest.

Great National Festivals

These three annual festivals were generally held in every temple. Besides these, there were national festivals which took place at the centers of religion. Every nine years such a gathering occurred at the great temple at Uppsala, and all Swedes were required to attend. Its object was to sacrifice to the gods for peace, and, in case of war, for victory for the king. In Denmark a similar festival was held at Leire, near Roskilde, in January of

[22] Craigie, *The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*, 62.

[23] Tille, Alexander, *Yule and Christmas*, 195, 199; *Gísla Saga Surssonar*, 36–37.

[24] Feilberg, *Jul*, 96.

[25] *Ibid.*, 96–98.

every ninth year.[26] It is probable that religious gatherings of the same nature took place in Norway.

At all times of special gatherings in honor of the gods, a definite peace was proclaimed throughout the region.[27] Furthermore, no weapon might be taken inside the temple, and murder within its precincts was punishable by outlawry.[28]

Religious Peace

When the temple was in private hands, it was customary for the godi to supply the food and drink for the sacrificial feasts; in other cases, each worshipper was expected to bring offerings. Under the supervision of the godi, the animals were slaughtered before the images of the gods and their blood caught in the bowls made for the purpose. By means of bundles of twigs, the altar, the walls of the temple, and the people were sprinkled with this sacrificial blood, and thus the worshippers were united with their gods.[29] This was followed by the ceremonial banquet held in the nave of the temple, which was usually draped with tapestries, and otherwise decorated for the occasion. The flesh from the sacrificial animals was cooked in kettles over fires built down through the middle of the room; and over the fires the ceremonial horns filled with wine or ale were passed—probably as an act of purification. The banquet, like the sacrifices, was under the direction of the godi; and he, as lord of the feast, "signed the cups and all the meat"—probably with the hammer of Thor.[30]

Sacrificial Feasts

Minni-drinking, or memorial toasts, formed the most

[26] Craigie, *The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*, 56–57.
[27] Grönbech, *Vor Folkeaet i Oldtiden*, IV, 14.
[28] Craigie, *The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*, 46.
[29] Feilberg, *Jul*, 86.
[30] Keyser, *Nordmaendenes Religionsforfatning i Hedendommen*, 99.

important part of the ceremonial banquet, and corresponded to the libations poured out to the gods in the classical world. The first horn was usually quaffed to Odin for victory in battle and the dominion of the land by the king; then came the toasts to Njörd and Frey for abundant harvests and peace. Thor and Bragi were also remembered at this time. And the cup of memory was drunk in loving thought of dead kindred.

Minni-Drinking

After the adoption of Christianity the custom of minni-drinking was continued; but now the worshippers drank to Christ and Mary, the saints of the North, the archangel Michael, and even to the Holy Ghost. These toasts were most frequently offered at Christmas time and Easter.[31] And in some parts, toasts, at least to Christ and Mary, were required by law; in Norway, for instance, all persons who owned a certain minimum of property must hold a feast in their honor for prosperity and peace. Failure to comply was punishable by fine; and continued disobedience for three years might result in confiscation of property and banishment.[32] The custom of religious drinking lasted in Iceland until after the opening of the seventeenth century,[33] and a vestige of this old Teutonic ceremony still survives in many lands in the practice of drinking to the health of the living. Thus the pagan prayer and offering to the gods has been transformed into a friendly toast to one's fellow men.[34]

The Northmen sacrificed various kinds of animals to win the favor of the gods, the one used being determined by the part of the country as well as by the deity to be honored. The humbler people in

Sacrificial Animals

[31] Visted, *Vor Gamle Bondekultur*, 189.
[32] *Norges Gamle Love*, I, 6.
[33] Craigie, *The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*, 61.
[34] Grönbech, *Vor Folkeaet i Oldtiden*, IV, 46.

western Scandinavia appear to have most frequently offered the goat, but the sheep was the more customary sacrificial animal. Cattle, horses, dogs, swine, and cocks were slaughtered for the gods in great numbers on some occasions; and even men gave up their lives for the sake of gaining or retaining the favor of the divinities. At the national festival held at Uppsala every nine years men, horses, and dogs were sacrificed and their bodies hung in the famous sacred grove adjoining the temple; and at the corresponding festival at Leire, Denmark, ninety-nine men as well as the same number of horses, dogs, and cocks gave up their lives on pagan altars.[35] Cattle were commonly offered to Frey, but the horse was considered the noblest of the usual sacrificial animals and was a favorite of the god of plenty. Such a costly sacrifice could, however, be afforded only by the wealthy.[36] The boar also played an interesting part in a ceremony connected with Frey in Norway. At Jól time the largest boar that could be found was offered at a public sacrificial feast by the king, but before being killed the animal was led into the hall in front of the monarch to afford those present an opportunity to pass their hands over his bristles and utter vows; "and they considered him so holy that over his bristles they would swear in all their great cases." [37]

Human Sacrifice

The sacrifice of human beings during the viking era appears to have been largely limited to special crises and the great national festivals; and the persons then put to death were usually criminals or slaves. In Iceland and, presumably, in

[35] Craigie, *The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*, 56–57.

[36] Unwerth, Wolf von, *Untersuchungen über Totenkult und Odinnverehrung bei Nordgermanen*, 70; Keyser, *Nordmaendenes Religionsforfatning i Hedendommen*, 67.

[37] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 309.

Scandinavia as a whole, the doom-ring and the sacrificial stone stood near the temple. Within the one, men were condemned to be offered to the gods, and upon the other, their bodies were broken.[38] The remains of such sacrifices were probably buried promptly. Besides the human sacrifice already mentioned, which took place at the special religious gatherings, other evidence of such offerings by an assembled people and by individuals may be found in the sagas. It is stated, for instance, that in early Sweden during a period of severe famine the people sacrificed their king, named Olaf, by burning him in his own house, in the hope of gaining the pity of the gods. This offering was probably made to Frey; and the object in choosing the king for it, seems to have been the hope that he, as chief priest of the land, would be especially acceptable to the gods. Moreover, this particular king was suspected of having neglected to make proper sacrifices to Frey, and, thus, to have invited famine.[39] Men's lives were also given to Odin. King Aun of Uppsala is said to have sacrificed his nine sons to this deity in the effort to prolong his own life; and Hakon Jarl, to have offered his seven-year-old son to the war god as a token of gratitude for victory.[40]

The Northman probably rarely offered prayer to the deities except in connection with gifts of one sort or another; usually a memory toast was drunk with appropriate words, or food or other gifts were placed before the

[38] *Ibid.*, 69, 264.

[39] Keyser, *Nordmaendenes Religionsforfatning i Hedendommen*, 102; Craigie, *Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*, 58.

Even after Christianity was well established, in 1350, at the time of the Black Death in Sweden, the West Gothlanders met and determined upon human sacrifice as a means of getting rid of the plague; and, in consequence, two beggar children were put to death. Mogk, E., "Die Menschenopfer bei den Germanen," in *Abhandlungen*, etc., XXVII, 625.

[40] Keyser, *Nordmaendenes Religionsforfatning i Hedendommen*, 102.

image of the god and the wish directly expressed to it. And the god was expected to respond. It was also quite common to make a compact with a favorite god, as intimated in the preceding paragraph. Perhaps the mercantile experience of the viking period taught that this was the safest and most economical plan. A worshipper would vow, for example, to make certain offerings if the deity would show him favor; and often a small gift was presented at the time of the prayer, perhaps to rouse the interest and anticipation of the god. Thus, before the opening of battle warriors promised sacrifices if the gods would give them victory. Members of the enemy army taken prisoners were dedicated to such use.[41] But it was also very usual to make the offering ahead of time, in this way taking for granted fair play on the part of the deity. The Swedes, for instance, would place a sacrificial animal in front of their own battle line when the enemy appeared.[42] Similarly, before a voyage the Northmen would offer sacrifice for good weather.[43] And as soon as the merchant ship stopped at a port for the purpose of trading, the Northern merchants offered food and drink to the gods. Along the Volga in Swedish Russia, according to the Arab Ibn-Fadlan, the merchants sacrificed to wooden images erected there in order to secure success in trading. If commerce went slowly or badly, the merchants would return two or three times with more gifts. And if the gods showed favor, gratitude was manifested in the form of sacrificial feasts.[44]

Prayer: the Bargain Element in Worship

[41] Mogk, E., "Die Menschenopfer bei den Germanen," in *Abhandlungen*, XXVII, 603–616.

[42] Grönbech, *Vor Folkeaet i Oldtiden*, IV, 80.

[43] Mogk, "Die Menschenopfer bei den Germanen," in *Abhandlungen* der Philologisch-Historischen Klasse, XXVII, 616–622.

[44] Ibn-Fadlan, 7–9.

In order that they might know the will of the gods and secure their advice, the Scandinavians resorted to the use of oracles; but these were much simpler than those used by the Greeks and Romans for obtaining divine communications. In most cases they appear to have been directly connected with the sacrifices, which were at times offered for purely oracular reasons. The view of the deity was believed to be expressed through accidental happenings. Thorkell, an Icelander, for example, led an old ox to the temple of Frey as a gift to secure that god's help in avenging himself against an enemy. When the ox, immediately after the prayer had been uttered, bellowed loudly and fell to the ground dead, Thorkell interpreted the happening as a favorable reply from the god.[45] More frequently, perhaps, the divine will was ascertained in connection with the sprinkling of blood about the temple as a part of the sacrificial ceremonies; but in this case the priest read the signs and offered the interpretation.

Oracles and Soothsayers

By casting lots of one sort or another the Northmen also obtained divine messages. The methods employed seem all to have been mere modifications of those in use, according to Tacitus, among the early Germans. Among them, consecrated chips from a fruit tree were carefully marked and thrown upon a white cloth, after which the priest, or the father of the household—if the oracle was being consulted in private—interpreted the oracle by means of the position of the pieces of wood and the markings upon them. This system appears to have been transmitted from the ancient Teutons to the Lapps by means of the Scandinavians.[46] In Denmark and Sweden,

[45] "Glûma," in *Islenzkar Fornsögur*, I, 29–30.
[46] Bugge, *Norges Historie*, vol. I, pt. I, 205.

wooden sticks or pegs or weights such as were employed in scales were made use of in a like manner.[47]

Though any one might consult the gods in the ways mentioned, there seems no doubt that in connection with some of the pagan places of worship there were persons believed to be possessed of special skill in securing divine communications. In the ancient writings is mentioned a temple of Frey in charge of a woman one of whose functions was to consult the will of the deity. But the greatest oracle of the North was connected with the temple at Uppsala, which was well known beyond the boundaries of Sweden and was consulted by foreign rulers.[48]

Belief in Immortality

That the Scandinavians of the ancient time believed firmly in a life beyond the grave is shown not only by the verbal testimony of the sagas but also by the elaborate equipment buried with the dead; and this equipment indicates that they expected to live in the hereafter very much as they did during their career in the flesh. But,—as in the case of people of virtually all religions, Christianity included,—there was mental confusion and inconsistency with reference to just where the soul abode after death. The belief that after a long journey it dwelt with the gods in celestial regions existed side by side with worship on the grave mounds and the conviction that the soul lived within the mound. Also, change as well as confusion is discernible in connection with the belief in a special dwelling place for the spirits of the dead; in earlier times, Helheim was spoken of as the abode of all departed souls; later, during the Viking Age, when the warrior was especially exalted, Valhalla, the heaven of battle-slain

[47] Petersen, *Nordboernes Gudedyrkelse og Gudetro*, 31–32.
[48] Chadwick, "The Ancient Teutonic Priesthood," in *Folklore*, XI, 300.

Norsemen, assumed a prominent place in the religious views of the North. And yet, there was uncertainty as to who should go to Valhalla after all, for some believed that those who met death otherwise than while fighting should abide there as well as the warriors.[49]

Christianity also made its influence felt, towards the close of the heathen period, in the Scandinavian attitude towards the after life. Since the purely heathen religion did not take cognizance of sin in the Christian sense, during early times there seems to have been no separation of souls after death by classification into good and bad, righteous and wicked, though there was a conviction that the person who in the flesh had violated the ethical code of the time would be despised in the after life. But, later, a shadowy idea of a final doomsday was incorporated with the earlier belief, and, with it, a somewhat nebulous view that the virtuous as well as the merely brave would go to Valhalla, while blasphemy and baseness would close this place to even those displaying the greatest physical courage.[50]

The Transition Period

Besides the instances already mentioned, the Christian religion influenced the people of the North in other ways before the new faith was actually adopted. The Scandinavian warriors and merchants who wandered in foreign countries were the chief disseminators of Christian usages at home; and one practice to which the historical sources frequently refer as common among them should be first mentioned. This was "prime signing." They had themselves signed with the cross (*prima signatio*), even though they by no means accepted the faith of Christians; and neither did the ceremony presuppose that they had

[49] Craigie, *Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*, 17.
[50] *Njála*, 89.

forsaken the gods of their fathers. Great advantage to trade came from this concession to the religion of the South, for Christians were much more willing to mingle with prime-signed men than with heathen who had not taken this step.[51]

By the opening of the tenth century a goodly proportion of the Scandinavian people had become somewhat familiar with the observances of the Christian religion, and upon the continent the Church counted many Northmen among its converts. In the western islands progress was slower, perhaps partly because some of the settlers affiliated with the defeated and dying Celtic Church and appear to have worshipped Columba, its leader during its days of prosperity, as half saint and half god.[52] The introduction of Christianity into the North produced various gradations of views, as regards personal religion. Some men became frankly skeptical, abandoning the old deities but refusing to accept the new; others—probably only a few—adopted a deistic conception broader than either of the faiths with which they were acquainted, consisting of a belief in a great Creator and in the immortality of the soul, qualified by a realization of the limitation of human knowledge concerning matters divine. An Icelander of this class, Thorstein Ingemundsson, expressed the firm conviction that his dead father would enjoy a blissful reward for his piety "with him who created the sun and all the world, whoever he may be."[53] More were probably mixed in their faith, like Helge the Lean, who put his trust in Christ in some regards and named his homestead "Christness," "but yet would pray to Thor on sea voyages and in hard

[51] *Grettis Saga Asmundarsonar*, 37; *Njála*, 158.
[52] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 27, 28, 29, 32, 34.
[53] Keyser, *Nordmaendenes Religionsforfatning i Hedendommen*, 176–177.

stresses, and in all things that he thought were of most account to him."[54] Other Northmen, on the other hand, long refused even to compromise, and steadily held to the gods of their fathers, even though members of their family adopted the new religion; and thus relatives were estranged. Beorn, a Norwegian, was one of this conservative class. When he reached the Shetlands, where some of his family had preceded him, he found that his brother and sisters had adopted the new faith, and he "thought it a craven thing that they had thrown over the old way which their kinsmen had held and he could not rest there and would not make his abode there." Consequently, he departed and settled in Iceland.[55]

[54] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 149.
[55] *Ibid.*, 258.

CHAPTER XXIII

SUPERSTITION

There are beech-runes, help-runes, love-runes, and great power-runes, for whomsoever will, to have for charms, pure and genuine, till the world falls in ruin. Profit by them if thou canst.

From a spell song in *Volsunga Saga.*

Status of the Northmen as Regards Superstitious Beliefs and Practices

No single people have the monopoly of superstitious ideas, and among no group of human beings do the superstitious beliefs and practices differ greatly from those found elsewhere; for unenlightened minds react similarly to similar, uncomprehended phenomena. But the naïve sagas —unlike most of the European literature contemporary with them—present real cross-section views of life, colored with various erroneous beliefs and numerous quaint misinterpretations of natural phenomena; and, in consequence, the superstitious views of the Northmen are revealed with unusual clearness, leaving the unjustifiable impression that these people were superstitious to a unique degree. As a matter of fact, they were probably no more characterized by superstition than the other Teutons, or the Celtic peoples of the Middle Ages; and they were probably less dominated by superstitious fear. Furthermore, in consideration of the lack of scientific knowledge in the Viking Age it seems probable that the ancient Scandinavians were freer from the taint of superstition than the people of the present period. They were, however, possessed of a large body of miscellaneous misbeliefs and distorted views which are of special interest

for the very reason that we are so lacking in information regarding this subject for the other peoples of Western Europe. And these superstitions must be considered if we are to have an all-around picture of the early Northmen.

Good and Bad Luck

To the ancient Northman luck was a very real thing, and it seems still to play a much stronger part among their modern descendants than among most other civilized peoples. Some were predestined to good luck, others, to bad. The buffeting which Grettir experienced at the hands of unkind Fortune forms the theme of one of the strongest of the Icelandic sagas; Audun the Lucky was, on the other hand, one upon whom Fortune smiled. He acquired wealth and standing through the shrewd bestowal upon the king of Denmark of a tame polar bear brought from Greenland. After this he settled in Iceland and remained a "lucky" man as long as he lived.[1] But the Scandinavians were inconsistent in their conception of luck, for though the character of one's luck was foreordained by the Norns—according to the popular view—it was, nevertheless, possible to modify this fortune by means of charms and other magical devices. Furthermore, the wishes of others could influence one's career favorably or unfavorably.

Signs and Omens

Belief in signs and omens was very general and, in some of its phases, was related to the real religion of the North, considered in the preceding chapter; for in many cases the phenomena which attracted attention were regarded as manifestations of the gods, sent in answer to prayer. Others were looked upon as merely chance happenings, in a sense undirected, but

[1] *Grettis Saga Asmundarsonar;* "Audun," in Sweet, Henry, *An Icelandic Primer.*

having, nevertheless, a lesson for those who would pause and read it. Many such portents were connected with warfare. To stumble when going into battle foretold coming misfortune, and for a warrior to find himself fighting with his face to the sun was also a bad omen; but to see two men talking, to hear a wolf howl, or to see a raven, on the eve of battle, were favorable signs. If, however, the raven croaked, the sign was bad. If weapons made unusually loud sounds when used, or if blood dripped from them, the coming battle would be very fierce.[2]

Dreams received much attention, for they were looked upon by many as signs and warnings, especially if they were of an unusual or vivid nature. Probably no other literature gives so conspicuous a place to dreams as that composed by the Scandinavians; the sagas are filled with accounts of persons distressed by evil dreams, or made happy by those of good import.[3] When a dream was believed to be of special significance, the one who had experienced it tried promptly to get at its meaning. If he could not interpret it for himself, he would appeal to those immediately about him with the request: "Tell me my dream." Such members of the household or social gathering often differed as to the meaning; and at times some of them thought the dreams of no special import—"mere dreams."[4] But if the person most concerned believed that the real significance had not been revealed, he would be likely to go to a "dream-wise" person—a man or woman skilled in the interpretation of portentous phenomena of one sort or another—

Dreams

[2] Du Chaillu, *The Viking Age*, I, 450–452.

[3] See especially *Gisla Saga Surssonar, passim.*

[4] *Ibid.;* "Glûma," in *Islenzkar Fornsögur*, I, 26; *Njála*, 316–318; *Laxdoela Saga*, 93–95.

and would govern his actions by the interpretation rendered.[5]

Similarly, considerable space in the sagas is devoted to ghosts and hauntings. There were buildings and even whole regions in Iceland so frequented by the spirits of the dead that they were without living occupants;[6] and there were households which were constantly annoyed or distressed by the nocturnal activities of ghostly visitors. Some of these specters merely wandered about the dwelling following their own interests and directly harming no one, though making the family very uncomfortable by their presence. Others, however, were more maliciously inclined and disturbed the slumberers and threatened to wreck the house by riding upon the ridge-pole—a favorite pastime of Scandinavian ghosts. One of the Icelandic sagas tells of the shade of a gigantic Swede who rode the roofs so violently at night "that he went nigh to breaking them in."[7] This particular Swedish ghost also made the killing of men and animals a part of his nightly occupations. Similar activities are recorded of other ghosts.[8]

Ghosts

The return of departed spirits was attributed to various causes. The desire to have revenge upon those who had been enemies of the deceased during his mortal career was a common explanation. People who failed to comply with the wishes of the dying were also likely to be troubled by resentful ghosts. But many spirits roamed abroad with much less excuse; some appear to have been merely restless, while others were the shades of vicious men who persisted in their evil courses after death.

[5] *Ljósvetinga Saga*, 194–195, 197; *Origines Islandicae*, II, 477.
[6] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 197.
[7] *Saga of Grettir the Strong*, 100.
[8] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 115.

In an effort to rid themselves of the unwelcome spectral guests, the Northmen resorted to various devices. Perhaps the most usual was to exhume the body of the deceased and bury it in a new place, or burn it.[9] But in the case of those drowned at sea such a remedy was rarely possible, and, in consequence, other things were tried, even to bringing indictment by regular legal procedure against the spirits for their nocturnal visits. *Eyrbyggja Saga* gives a detailed account of how some litigious Icelanders rid a house of a large spirit crew of drowned sailors, "by due process of law." James Bryce calls attention to the interesting fact that this is the only example upon record of the law being used against the dead.[10]

Yet, though doubtless a larger proportion of the population then believed in the existence of ghosts than in modern Scandinavia, and though the believers made more active warfare against the enemy, there were, nevertheless, many people who seem to have been quite skeptical of the ability of the dead to harm the living. The frequency with which adventurers broke into and robbed burial mounds clearly indicates this.

Hamingjur or Fylgjur

A superstition in some ways resembling the belief in ghosts, but also closely bordering upon religion, was the belief in guardian spirits somewhat like the dísir mentioned in the preceding chapter but differing in that they were more personal and were not subjects of worship, as were the dísir. These beings were commonly known as *hamingjur* or *fylgjur;* but in the minds of some people they were perhaps identified with the dísir, and, hence, the confusion

[9] *Ibid.*, II, 647.

[10] "Primitive Iceland," in *Studies in History and Jurisprudence*, I, 312–359.

in the sagas.[11] Generally, these spirits remained invisible and in the body of the person whom they guarded until that person was about to die, when—according to the belief of some—they came out and became the protecting geniuses of dear relatives.[12] Their coming forth was looked upon as a sign of bad luck or a notice of the approaching end. In their close association with the body of the person whom they protected, these attendant spirits had the characteristics of souls. Yet, as such, they usually took the shape of animals, frequently of swans if attached to a woman; but when they appeared as guardian spirits—more detached from the body—they generally had the forms of women. Often, they revealed themselves in dreams, which was also considered a sign of coming ill tidings or death.[13]

By some, these hamingjur or fylgjur were said to be the children of the great Norns or Fates, who were the guardians of all humanity; hence, they were the luck or "good fate" of the one with whom they dwelt. This latter conception, combined with the belief that they had also a spirit character, seems to explain the idea held by some that one could give one's luck (*hamingja*) to another. This is suggestive of the Jewish and Christian practice of bestowing blessings, as in the case of Isaac and Jacob; but in the heathen Scandinavian view the blessing or good fortune was a spiritual being which might be visible to the giver and the recipient.[14]

Nykar

Like the other Teutonic peoples, the Northmen believed in supernatural beings of various sorts, inferior to the gods and the other powers considered in the preceding chapter, and not objects of wor-

[11] Blum, Ida, *Die Schützgeister in der Altnordischen Literatur*, 10–45.
[12] *Ibid.*, 16 ff.
[13] "Glúma," in *Islenzkar Fornsögur*, I, 26; *Volsunga Saga*, 9.
[14] See "Hamingja," in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary.

ship. These beings might remain neutral and indifferent to man, but they were liable to league themselves for or against him. In the view of the Northmen, the forests were inhabited by such "little people" of various sorts; and in the streams, lakes, and waterfalls dwelt sprites or goblins, called *nykar,* which took many shapes, sometimes appearing in the form of horses with inverted hoofs.[15]

This supernatural population of the woods and watercourses seems for the most part to have been friendly to man, or, at least, harmless. The trolls, on the other hand, were man's enemies, and studied to annoy and injure him. These beings were older inhabitants of the earth than even the gods; they and the giants,—to whom they seem to have been related, or with whom they coöperated,—were found by the deities upon their arrival here. The Northern divinities promptly levied war against the primordial inhabitants, and wiped out most of them, after which they placed man upon earth. But a few giants and trolls remained, in lonely, out-of-the-way places in the wilderness, and worked against the creature, man, who had supplanted them. Generally the trolls were invisible, but occasionally they were seen by man; and then they appeared large, like giants. They were proof against wounds by weapons, and it was not possible to purchase their favor by worship, as in the case of the gods; consequently, it was desirable to avoid them if possible, and when they must be faced, to take one's chances against them, as against bad weather or wild animals.[16] Even trolls, however, were not completely unfriendly in their attitude towards man; and they were even capable of

Trolls and Giants

[15] In the minds of the superstitious, the *nykr* still frequents the waterfalls of Norway and is known as "nykk" or "nökk"; and in the Highlands of Scotland stories of these sprites are still told.

[16] "Trolls take thee" was an ancient curse.

appreciating a kindness from him and of showing their gratitude in practical ways. But such friendliness was by no means common, and appears to have been almost completely limited to the females, who were less fierce and vicious than the male trolls.[17]

Dwarfs and Other Monstrosities

Besides giants, the Scandinavians believed that dwarfs and other variations of the human type shared the earth with them. These latter included mer-people, who were occasionally caught by fishermen,[18] and unipeds—beings possessed of but one leg. The unipeds were found only in remote parts and were usually so timid that at the sight of man they hopped away very rapidly.[19]

Sorcery and Magic

In crediting their fellow men with the ability to exercise supernatural powers, the Northmen appear to have gone further than most Europeans. Soothsaying, which was not very highly developed, has been treated under religion. Magic and sorcery played a much larger part in their daily lives; witches and wizards of varying degrees of ability were common amongst them. The Finns had special skill along such lines, and the majority of people practicing witchcraft and related arts appear to have been of Finnish blood; but many people of Teutonic origin were also in high repute because of their supernatural powers.[20]

[17] "Troll," in Cleasby and Vigfusson's Dictionary.

[18] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 54.

[19] Olson, Julius E., "The Voyages of the Northmen, in *Original Narratives of Early American History*, I, 40; *Cf.* Nansen, *In Northern Mists*, II, 11, 13, 17, 263. The belief in unipeds, like the belief in mer-folk, was rather general in Europe during the Middle Ages.

[20] Professor Bugge (*Norges Historie*, vol. I, pt. I, 214) believes that the Finns learned much of witchcraft from the Scandinavians, who he thinks were the original experts, and had become so advanced in this line by the Viking Age that they were teaching their teachers; but this hardly seems to have been the case, for not only are the Finns and Lapps skilled in magical and shamanistic practices but very much is made of these things

Such great ability did these dwellers in the Northern lands display, said Adam of Bremen, that "they have knowledge of the whole world." [21]

Both men and women practiced witchcraft, but more often the latter. These workers in magic were much respected by their fellows because of the power which they could exercise for good or evil, and were sought after by those who wished to profit by their power and would pay for the exercise of it. For they were believed able to heal the sick, awaken love in the opposite sex, raise or allay storms, or produce other meteorological phenomena, bring misfortune to the enemy in battle; in fact, there appears to have been no limit to the powers of these people.

They produced results in different ways, but generally their operations were preceded by incantations of which there appear to have been two common kinds, the one making much of magical songs and runes, and the other including the cooking of strange dishes, the ingredients of which were known only to the dealer in magic.[22] The latter, more complex, form of incantation was probably the less common. Most frequently perhaps the sorcerer merely accompanied the utterance of charmed words with magical passes and movements. The witch might mutter

by all of the peoples of Mongolian blood or culture along the whole northern border of Europe and Asia. It is more probable that the Scandinavians' interest in the occult was increased by the influence of their northern neighbors.

[21] p. 199.

[22] The last-mentioned accompaniment of the incantation ceremony was probably of later origin than the preceding, but when once established, it appears to have survived long and to have extended far. Olaus Magnus states (*History of the Goths, Swedes, & Vandals,* 46 ff) that an earthen pot was a common instrument of all witches, wherein they boiled the juices, herbs, worms, entrails, etc., used in their incantations. The beliefs and practices in northern Scotland which gave rise to the cauldron scene in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* were probably Scandinavian in origin.

charms, for instance, while she walked in a circle in a direction opposite to that of the sun's course. Besides directing their skill against persons and situations at long distance, the sorcerers stood ready to supply their patrons with a variety of magical media to be used by the latter upon the spot, such as drinks of oblivion, love philtres, charms which could secure one against the claws and teeth of wild beasts, and useful information which would help protect one against misfortune or evil. Certain runes might be used against malicious charms with good effect; the moon should be invoked against curses; and an ear of grain was a good protection against witchcraft in general.[23] The victorious swords, invulnerable cloaks, and other objects of unusual nature mentioned in the sagas were also produced through the aid of enchantment. Some witches were even able to make the body of the warrior proof against wounds from weapons. This they did by rubbing the body to find the vulnerable place, which was always marked by a knot, and supplying a special protection for it.[24]

Witches and wizards sometimes operated in the interest of their patrons by transporting themselves directly to the scene of operations, as to a ship or a battlefield, and there personally worked magic. We read, for example, of a witch who appeared on ship board for the purpose of supervising the production of a storm; and of a wizard sent on a special errand to Iceland by King Harold Gorm's son of Denmark who contemplated invading the island. While traveling on missions for others or in their own interests, sorcerers often changed their shapes—for they could assume any shape at will, and it was convenient to do so to avoid suspicion as well

[23] *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, I, 15.
[24] Du Chaillu, *The Viking Age*, I, 441.

as to save time. The wizard sent by Harold took the form of a whale for his journey to Iceland, in which form he explored much of the coast.[25] Most frequently the shape assumed was that of a lower animal, but sometimes sorcerers transformed themselves into the likenesses of inanimate objects. The witch Garhild, who changed herself into an ox-skin filled with water,[26] is an instance.

This ability of sorcerers to change into some other form is closely related to the world-wide belief in lycanthropy. In Scandinavia this power was known as *hamrammr*, and it was believed to be possessed by many who apparently otherwise had no more magical skill than ordinary individuals. Some people adopted the shape of the bear, but the wolf was the more popular form; and werwolf stories play an important part in the medieval literature of the North, as in the remainder of Europe, for the belief in werwolves persisted quite late. One chapter of the great history of Sweden by Olaus Magnus treats "Of the fierceness of men who by charms are turned into wolves;"[27] and even to-day the werwolf myth can hardly be said to have become entirely extinct in Scandinavia.[28]

Lycanthropy, Werwolves

The Scandinavians who were versed in necromancy not only wrought evil at the behest of other men and women, but some of them carried on vicious practices on their own initiative. One of the most common pastimes of this sort was night-riding; transforming themselves into nightmares, they went forth and hurt or killed in-

[25] *Saga Library*, III, 268–269.
[26] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 153.
[27] pp. 193–194.
[28] Baring-Gould, *The Book of Were-wolves;* O'Donnell, *Werwolves.*

nocent persons in their sleep.[29] But some sorcerers just as readily used their magic of their own volition for the benefit of humanity. A sorceress in Norway who benefitted a whole community by filling the sounds with fishes during a period of famine is an example of this.[30] Malevolent witches and wizards were, however, more common than kindly ones, and they were hated and feared by the Scandinavians; but life in the ancient North was by no means dominated by such fear.[31]

Punishment of Witches

During the heathen days, the use of magic was, in itself, not in disrepute; for the great Odin was believed to be the master of all sorts of sorcery; it was only the one who wrought mischief and disaster by the use of charms and spells that was hated and avoided. Yet, even such persons were seldom punished—perhaps because of fear of their superior power. But some instances do exist of the trial and punishment of witches in the old days, particularly for night-riding;[32] among these is that of Katla, a particularly notorious Icelandic witch, who was stoned to death.[33] With the coming of Christianity, however, divination of all sorts came to be looked down upon and was outlawed throughout the North;[34] and witch-burning was industriously pursued by the most pious of the early Christian kings.[35] The Northern people nevertheless clung to magical beliefs and practices, for these

[29] *Saga Library,* II, 29.

[30] *Origines Islandicae,* I, 109.

[31] There appears to be no real foundation for the statement made by Powell in his introduction to Saxo Grammaticus (LXXX), that "Heathen Teutonic life was a long terror by reason of witchcraft, as in heathen Africa to-day."

[32] *Saga Library,* II, 48; *Origines Islandicae,* I, 58, 62, 109.

[33] *Saga Library,* II, 48.

[34] *Norges Gamle Love,* I, 17.

[35] *Saga Library,* III, 312–313.

things were firmly established in their *mores;* and the whole system of divination lived on down into modern times.

"Second Sight," or Clairvoyance

Another class of people possessed of supernatural power were the clairvoyants—individuals having "foreknowledge" or "second sight."[36] These at times also made use of common magic, but they seem rarely to have used their power for evil purposes. When they operated as professionals, they usually limited themselves to foretelling and to giving advice; but many, like the great Njal of Iceland, made no public use of their gifts. The professionals appear to have been most frequently women, called *völvar;* and these were not only sought out at their homes by persons wishing to learn about future events, or to discover the whereabouts of lost articles or domestic animals,[37] but they were also in demand at feasts and entertainments, where they foretold the future for the pleasure and gratification of the guests, and answered questions with reference to important matters. One of the saga accounts of such a performance remarks that some of the hearers believed what the völva said, but that others did not; and another states that the "fortune-teller" told favorable things or not, according to the quality of her entertainment at the feasts.[38] A most interesting and remarkable description of a spae-woman, or völva, is to be found in the Saga of Eric the Red. The entertainment at which she played a prominent part was held in Greenland more than nine hundred years ago.[39]

[36] "Glúma," in *Islenzkar Fornsögur,* I, 36; *Volsunga Saga,* 9, 52.

[37] *Origines Islandicae,* II, 98. In the remoter parts of Scandinavia the peasants to-day consult "wise" men and women for the same purpose.

[38] Du Chaillu, *Viking Age,* I, 394, 396, 401.

[39] This description may be found in English translation between pages

It is not improbable that such clairvoyants at times filled the office of soothsayers in the temples, but there is no proof that this was the case.

20 and 23 of Olson, Julius E., (ed.), "The Voyages of the Northmen," in *Original Narratives of Early American History*, vol. I.

CHAPTER XXIV

DEATH AND BURIAL

. . . though thou hast lost thy brother, it is manly to bear it well, for man must live after man.

Egils Saga.

The humanitarian spirit of the present time which reflects itself in the tender care of the sick is a thing of recent growth; even in the late Middle Ages such sympathy was rare in Christian lands, and it was less common still during the heathen period in Scandinavia. Except at the hands of friends and relatives, the sick received scant attention, unless it was paid for. Though most people felt a certain sense of social obligation towards the helpless, the aid which they gave was usually a very meager minimum; if no friend was about, poor folk and slaves could expect little else than that food and water be placed beside them, after which they were left to die or recover, just as the Fates decreed.[1]

Care of the Sick

But whether alone or surrounded by loved ones, when the end approached, the Northman met it manfully. He did not welcome death, but neither did he fear it; he merely faced it with the dauntless spirit displayed towards the earlier and lesser adventures of his career. To do so was only in harmony with the fatalistic philosophy which more or less shaped his life. However, when his mortal experiences had terminated and he had drawn his last breath, it was well for the

Nábjargir

[1] Ibn-Fadlan, 11.

living if some friend was near at hand to perform *náb jargir* for him—to press down the eyelids and to close the nostrils as well as the mouth. Otherwise, misfortune might be expected to visit other members of the household; for it was believed that evil would befall any one who passed in front of the corpse before this final friendly act was done.[2]

Preparation of the Corpse for Burial

In preparation for its burial, servants or friends washed the body and clad it as for a feast in the finest clothing and ornaments that circumstances would permit. The most important part of the apparel was the *hel* shoes, which would enable the deceased to walk safely to the realm of departed spirits; but the records do not make clear just what was the nature of these shoes.[3] All preparation for the final putting away of the corpse was made as soon as possible, and in the interval the body lay upon boards in a spare apartment of the dwelling house or in an outbuilding and was watched over by members of the household.[4] When everything was ready for the removal of the dead one, friends and relatives gathered around and whispered into the cold ears loving words of farewell, and repeated wishes for a safe and pleasant journey to the land of the shades.[5] It is probable that the farewells and friendly wishes were again uttered in songs and spoken words while the remains were being carried out, as was customary in early Christian times throughout the North and is still done in parts of Iceland. If death had come from natural causes, the body was taken through the main door of the dwelling;

[2] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 114.
[3] *Ibid.*, I, 563; *Gísla Saga Surssonar*, 32.
[4] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 604.
[5] *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, I, 43; *Saga Library*, III, 188.

but if the end had been due to violence, a hole was broken in the wall back of the head of the corpse as it lay in readiness and the body was borne through this opening; or a passage was occasionally dug under the house-wall for the same purpose. The motive behind this extra trouble was to confuse the spirit of the departed so it could not find its way back and haunt the house; for those coming to their deaths through violence were likely to be more restless than others. In early Christian days it was customary to carry the body around the house outside three times. The practice was doubtless heathen in source and had originally the object just mentioned.[6]

Though the bodies of slaves were occasionally left to the birds and beasts of prey, and thieves and robbers were permitted to remain where they were hanged,—by way of warning to evil-doers,[7] —public opinion, often backed by law, usually demanded that corpses be put out of sight in some manner. In Iceland, any one finding a dead body and failing to cover it was liable to punishment.[8] The remains of the friendless who died by the wayside, and those of persons put to death in punishment for crime, were usually buried without ceremony under a cairn of stones or a heap of earth. But persons having any sort of standing in a community were shown much more consideration. In very early times their remains were regularly burnt; for the practice of cremation was so old in the North that its origin was attributed to Odin, who was said to have established it by law. And throughout the Bronze and early Iron Ages this was virtually the only method of dis-

Disposal of the Remains of the Dead

[6] Visted, *Vor Gamle Bondekultur*, 247.
[7] Ibn-Fadlan, 11.
[8] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 474.

posing of the dead;[9] but with the Roman period, probably as a result of the influence of Christianity, corpses began to be inhumed unburnt;[10] and by the Viking Age, though both systems were practiced in the North, simple burial was perhaps, on the whole, the more common of the two. However, cremation still predominated in certain sections. In Swedish Russia—perhaps because of Oriental influence—it was unusually prolonged, and appears to have been the almost invariable rule even as late as the tenth century;[11] and in northern Scandinavia, due to the remoteness of the region, it was the more common custom.[12] In Iceland, on the other hand, there appears to be no trace of cremation;[13] all graves so far examined in that place have been filled with inhumed remains. This fact is explainable partly by the late settlement of the island—after burial had become well known in Norway,—but the scarcity of fuel, and the proximity to the British Isles, where burial was the rule, were doubtless influential also.

Cremation

The remains were generally cremated upon a funeral pyre, or in a boat or ship, on the land belonging to the family of the deceased; for no public cemeteries were found in the North until after the introduction of Christianity, when they grew up around the churches. The torch was applied to the pyre, presumably by the nearest relative to the dead, and the ashes remaining after the fires had died out were gathered and buried in an urn of clay, wood, soapstone, or iron, or—

[9] *Saga Library*, III, 20.

[10] Schetelig, Haakon, "Traces of the Custom of 'Suttee' in Norway during the Viking Age," in *Saga Book*, VI, 182–183.

[11] Ibn-Fadlan, 11, 21.

[12] Steenstrup, *Danmarks Historie*, I, 358; Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 205.

[13] Kålund, Kr., "Islands Fortidslaevninger," in *Aarböger for Nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie*, 1882, p. 77.

as was perhaps most often the case—a mound of earth was erected over them where they lay.[14] Chieftains and other people of high rank were occasionally cremated in a more spectacular manner. The dead one, supplied with an elaborate equipment, was placed in his ship on the strand and the vessel was fired and set adrift. When it had burned to the water's edge, the ship generally sank; but usually not until long after it had passed far from the ken of kindred and friends of the lone passenger.[15]

Burial

There were various methods of inhuming the body unburnt. In some cases it was placed in a coffin of wood or stone and buried beneath the surface of the ground, very much as at present. This was done far back in the Stone Age of Scandinavia, but later was virtually supplanted by cremation, and seems to have been reintroduced into the North in the Viking Age largely in imitation of the Christian nations to the south. In this later period, however, it was probably an exceptional method of burial.[16] More often the maritime Northmen appear to have used a small row-boat in place of the box-like coffin. The boat-coffins were buried underground, or mounds of earth were thrown up over them. Great numbers of such boat-graves have been found in modern times. A rarer practice, sometimes followed in the case of warriors slain in battle, was to drive the war-chariot containing the corpse into the mound prepared for its reception, after which the horses drawing the chariot were killed and entombed with their master. In this instance, the chariot served for a coffin.[17]

More often, among the well-to-do, the body was placed

[14] Ibn-Fadlan, 11, 19, 21; Keyser, *Private Life of the Old Northmen*, 174.

[15] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 484.

[16] Steenstrup, *Danmarks Riges Historie*, I, 358; Kålund, "Familielivet på Island," in *Aarböger*, 1870, pp. 372–373.

[17] Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 205.

Sepulchral Chambers

in some sort of sepulchral chamber, resembling the dwellings of the living. Over this was thrown a mound of earth, sometimes before, sometimes after, the dead had been laid within. Occasionally this mausoleum was constructed directly upon the bare earth, but probably more often it was erected upon a large boat or ship. In the former case

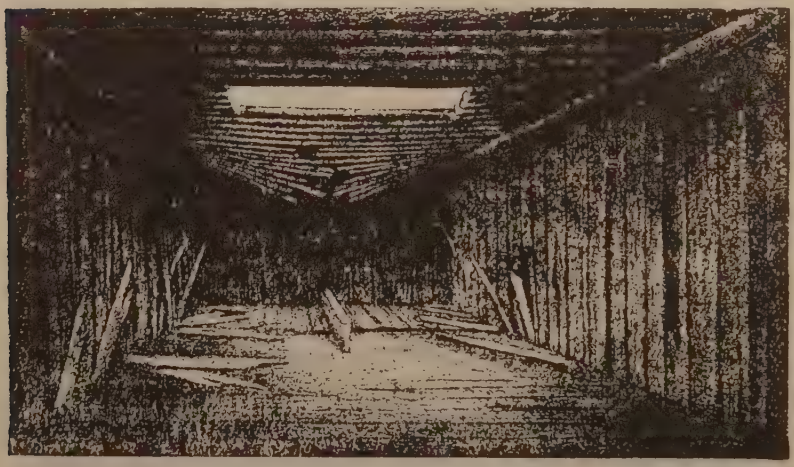


Fig. 46. Grave Chamber of Queen Thyra of Denmark. (From Steenstrup's *Danmarks Historie.*)

it was modeled after the room of a dwelling house, but on a smaller scale (Fig. 46); [18] in the latter, it was shaped like the tents pitched on ship board by mariners, or erected on the shore when they landed to pass the night, but the material commonly used for the ship-burial cham-

[18] The most elaborate tomb of this sort so far discovered is that of Queen Thyra of Denmark, a Christian, whose husband was King Gorm the Old, a pagan. The room was about twenty-one feet long, nine broad, and five high, and was constructed—floor, walls, and ceiling—of closely fitted oaken planks three or four inches thick. Montelius, Oscar, "Boning, Grav, och Tempel," in *Antikvarisk Tidskrift för Sverige*, etc., vol. XXI, pt. I, p. 65.

bers was probably wood instead of tent cloth.[19] The apartment in which the dead was to repose was fitted out as if to be occupied by the living, with hangings on the walls, and beds, chairs, tables, and other things making for comfort. The most elaborate piece of furniture was usually that intended to hold the corpse. Sometimes this was a chair, in which the body was placed in an upright posture; but more often the remains were laid upon a couch or bed decked with bright coverlets and supplied with cushions filled with down.[20] A goodly supply of food was also placed in the chamber by thoughtful relatives and friends, with the utensils and other things necessary to cook and serve it.[21]

Personal Equipment

The dead were also given a special, personal equipment. Dogs were very commonly buried with both men and women, and were intended to guide and guard the spirit of the deceased on its journey to Asgard, and to be its pet and companion after arrival there. Other pets, as falcons, and even imported peacocks, were also entombed with the dead.[22] A goodly supply of wearing apparel for all occasions was included, and each man was also equipped with his weapons—or, at least, his favorite sword—and the ordinary tools which he might need; and each woman, with the household utensils and implements to which she was accustomed. The Oseberg ship,[23] which was the burial

[19] The largest burial ships as yet found are the two from Gokstad and Oseberg, near Christiania. These specimens may be seen in the National Museum in Christiania. A detailed description of the Gokstad vessel is given in N. Nicolaysen's *The Viking-Ship Discovered at Gokstad* in Norway, Christiania, 1882. The Norwegian Government is preparing to publish a great work on *The Oseberg Discoveries*. The editors of this are A. W. Brögger, H. J. Falk, and Haakon Schetelig.

[20] Müller, *Vor Oldtid*, 655.

[21] Ibn-Fadlan, 15.

[22] The remains of a peacock were found in the Gokstad ship.

[23] See note 19 of this chapter.

place of a Norse woman of high degree, contained the most elaborate equipment so far discovered. This included needles, balls of thread and wax, spinning and weaving appliances, tubs, pails, kettles, and other kitchen utensils, and even a hand-mill for grinding grains. Considerable gold and silver—to be used for commercial transactions in the spirit land—was also buried with people of wealth, but more often with men than with women, for the former, in consequence of their activity as pirates and traders, were more likely to possess riches of that sort.[24] So common was it to bury precious metals with the dead that the conventional method used for securing treasure by adventurers whose careers are described in the sagas was digging in a grave mound.

Transportation Facilities Provided for the Dead

If the deceased was a person of wealth, care was taken to supply him with adequate facilities for transportation to the land of shades. Often when a warrior was buried in his chariot, a saddle, and sometimes an additional horse, was added, in order that the traveler might have his choice between riding and driving.[25] Even the humbler people buried in small boats, used for coffins, as already described, appear to have been quite generally provided with at least one horse,[26] which was presumably meant to be ridden. Lavishly equipped tombs, such as those uncovered at Gokstad and Oseberg, contained a dozen or more horses, and sometimes oxen and other cattle. And graves like these were often supplied with a variety of vehicles as well. In the Oseberg burial mound, for instance, were

[24] *Origines Islandicae*, II, 283.

[25] Montelius, *Civilization of Sweden in Heathen Times*, 205.

[26] Brunn, Daniel, and Finnur Jónsson, "Dalvik-Fundet: en Gravplads fra Hedenskabets Tid på Island," in *Aarböger*, XXV, 70–94.

found a four-wheeled wagon and four sleds, or sledges, of various sizes. It is, furthermore, obvious that the boats or ships, of whatever size, in which the Northmen were buried were intended to be used for the journey to the land of spirits. For this reason, they were always so placed within the tumulus or mound that their prows were pointed towards the edge of any stream or body of water near at hand. Nothing was overlooked by friends and relatives that would aid the spirit-voyager on his way.

The Suttee

But the Scandinavians of the Viking Age did not stop with sacrificing the lower animals in providing for the comfort and well-being of the departed. The followers of a chieftain or king were executed and buried with him, particularly in the more conservative eastern part of Scandinavia,[27] in order that he might not lack a proper retinue in the other world. Servants and slaves were by the same method condemned to labor after death for those whom they had served in life. The Oseberg ship contained the remains of such a serving woman. Mistresses were also entombed with their lovers; and wives, with their husbands. This custom of suttee has characterized practically all Indo-European peoples at some stage of their development, and rose from the conception of the wife as the property of her husband; hence, she, like his other possessions, must accompany him to the other world. Archæological investigation seems to prove, however, that the suttee was not very old in the North at the opening of the Viking Age; in no men's graves antedating the fourth century after Christ have the remains of women been found.[28] Its late origin seems to point to introduction of the

[27] Ibn-Fadlan, 21

[28] Seger, "Frauengraber," in Hoops, *Reallexikon*.

suttee from the Orient as a result of Eastern trading voyages. The custom probably never became very general in Scandinavia, and, because of the influence of the Christian lands to the south, was on the decline by the beginning of the ninth century. It lingered longest in Swedish Russia and Sweden, where paganism longest survived, but it was not unknown in Denmark and Norway during the Viking Age. On the other hand, no evidence exists that the women of Iceland were ever required to surrender their lives at the death of their husbands. It seems likely, therefore, that by the close of the ninth century when the island was settled the custom of suttee had become virtually extinct in Norway, and the unusual degree of independence enjoyed by the pioneer women of Iceland prevented any introduction of the dying practice from the motherland.[29]

[29] Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben*, 477. The Arab Ibn-Fadlan gives the most detailed account that we possess of human immolation among the Scandinavians. His observations were made along the Volga River in Swedish Russia in the first part of the tenth century, while he was on an errand in the region. At this time, he witnessed the whole proceedings connected with the disposal of the remains of a Scandinavian chieftain. When such a person of note died among the Scandinavians, he states, it was customary to ask the youths and maidens of the household for a volunteer to accompany the master in death. Whoever offered himself was bound to keep his word. In the instance described, a young girl agreed to give up her life, and as soon as she did so two other girls were appointed guards over her and were required to accompany her wherever she went, lest she change her mind and try to escape. During the days of preparation for the funeral, this girl sang and conducted herself in a gay and care-free manner, which the etiquette of the situation evidently demanded. An old woman, called by the others the "angel of death," or "agent of death" was a sort of general undertaker, or manager, of the funeral arrangements. Under her direction the ship belonging to the deceased was drawn up on the shore and in it was erected a sepulchral tent containing a richly decked couch, on which the body of the dead man was placed with his weapons beside him. Food and drink were also set conveniently near. This being done, several animals were killed and put in the ship, including a dog, a rooster and a hen, two oxen, and two horses.

Attention was next centered upon the voluntary victim. After taking part in a brief ceremony which appears to have possessed symbolic signi-

Some sort of religious ceremony was at times held at the grave before the remains were burned or buried. Ibn-Fadlan (in the account referred to in note 29 of this chapter) mentions the wooden images of the gods which surrounded the sepulchral ship as it stood on the shore ready to receive the remains; and to these idols the chieftain's friends prayed during the days of preparation for the funeral.[30] Sometimes a ceremony was held after the deceased had been fully equipped for his journey to the land of the shades, and the door of his sepulchral chamber had been closed for the last time. In the parts of the North where Thor was held in especially high esteem, this final ceremony seems to have been characterized by the consecration of the funeral pyre with the hammer symbolic of this deity.[31]

Religious Ceremonies Connected with Disposal of the Dead

To a people like the Northmen who made much of friendship and ties of blood, the death of a loved one brought genuine regret and often deep grief. But their characteristic reserve and training in self-control aided them to bear such losses with quiet courage. Only occasionally did grief become uncontrollable, as in the case of Egil Skalagrimsson, the poet,

Mourning

ficance, the young girl gave the jewelry which she wore to the two who had been her guardians. Then she was given two beakers of liquor to drink—evidently to brace her for the approaching ordeal; and, after addressing each of these in song, she emptied it. But she showed a tendency to linger over the drinking, and sang long over the second glass; and even after this was drained, she hesitated to enter the tent. The mistress of ceremonies, therefore, led her in, followed by six men who aided her in dispatching the victim. While the girl was being put to death some of the men in the crowd beat upon their shields to drown any cries that she might utter, lest the other girls become frightened and later show an unwillingness to die in a similar manner with their lords. Ibn-Fadlan, 15–20.

30 Ibn-Fadlan, 13.

31 Peterson, *Om Nordboernes Gudedyrkelse og Gudetro i Hedenold*, 58.

who tried to end his life by self-neglect after his son died. There appears, however, to have been very little, if any, formal or perfunctory mourning during the heathen period. The custom for a bereaved family to drape the halls of their dwelling with black and gray hangings probably did not antedate the introduction of Christian practices.[32]

Grave Mounds

The remains of the dead, however disposed of, were usually covered by a tumulus or mound of earth. Some such mounds were very large, and even at the end of a thousand years of settling and wearing away of the soil, many are still hillocks in size (Fig. 47). These heaps of earth were intended not only to cover thoroughly the dead and all his belongings but also to serve as a monument to his memory; consequently, people of wealth and importance were especially honored by great howes, while humbler folk had often but a low mound thrown over them, which quickly settled to the level of the surrounding ground. The shapes of the mounds varied, but they were usually circular, oval, triangular, or rectangular; the first-mentioned form was, however, the most common. Some graves were characterized by low tumuli pointed at each end, in resemblance of the deck plan of a ship, the outline being made of upright stones placed close together, those at the ends being unusually tall. Such graves existed in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, and the remains of some of them may still be seen (Fig. 48).[33]

Bauta-Stones

At a very early time—probably as early as the Old Stone Age—the Northmen began to erect special memorial stones over the graves of their dead, usually placing them on top of

[32] Du Chaillu, *Viking Age*, I, 421.
[33] Steenstrup, *Danmarks Riges Historie*, I, 358.

Fig. 47. Modern View of Circular Burial Ground. (From Gustafson's *Norges Oldtid*)

Fig. 48. Burial Place with Monumental Stones in Outline of a Ship. (From Gustafson's *Norges Oldtid*)

the mound. These stones were rough-hewn and varied greatly in size and shape; some were twelve to fifteen feet high; others were very low and did not appear more than one or two feet above ground. At times, they were in the form of an obelisk, but more frequently the sides were roughly vertical, with a height two or three times the thickness (Fig. 49).[34] Such stones were raised over the dead whether the remains were burned or buried; and often similar ones were erected to the memory of people lost at sea, or who died in foreign lands. Occasionally, they were even set up in honor of the living. These monuments of various sorts were especially numerous along the wayside, where the dead were frequently buried. In Sweden, in particular, as in ancient Rome, the roads were in places lined with them; and thus they served as waymarks as well as memorials.[35]

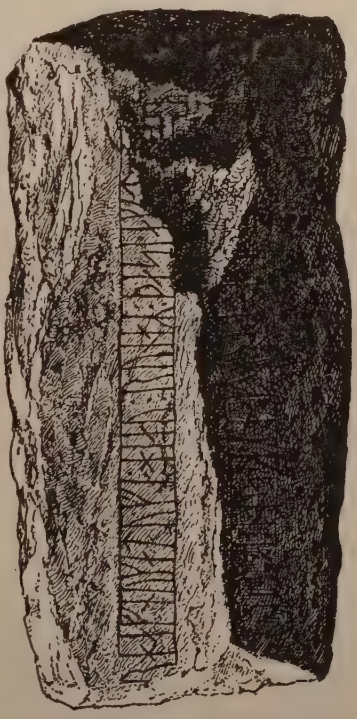


Fig. 49. Rough Hewn Monumental Stone with Thor's Hammers. (From Petersen's *Om Nordboernes Gudedyrkelse og Gudetro i Hedenold.*)

Previous to the ninth century the bauta-stones appear rarely to have borne inscriptions; but with the opening

[34] Nicolaissen, O., "Bautastene i det Höie Norden," in *Aarböger*, 1897, pp. 57–66.

[35] Friesen, Otto von, *Upplands Runstenar: en Allmänfattlig Ofversikt*, 15–16.

Epitaphs

of the viking period it soon became very customary to engrave upon them epitaphs and other inscriptions in runic characters.[36] This practice was doubtless in imitation of Christian lands, for it was much more common in southern Scandinavia where the contact with Christian Europe was closest. In the far northern part of the land no runic inscriptions of any sort are found upon the bauta-stones of this period. The epitaph gave the name and the position of the dead person and usually also told who erected the monument and who engraved the runes. If the deceased had journeyed in foreign lands, this fact was generally mentioned, for it added to his prestige. Often words of appreciation or praise of the dead were added. At times there were also warnings to the passer-by not to harm the memorial; or even a threat to "have the law on" any one who should remove or deface it.[37] On the later stones it was also not uncommon to cut an invocation to Thor, accompanied by the figure of his hammer; or the symbol of some other god.

In the late Viking Age elaborately carved stones came into use, particularly in the island of Gotland. These stones showed genuine skill in workmanship. The tops were commonly semi-circular or horseshoe shaped, and the surfaces, smooth.[38] Such stones occasionally had

[36] *Ibid.*, 7.

[37] Wimmer, Ludv. F. A., *Die Runenschrift*, 335–382.

The following are typical runic inscriptions: "Ragnhild erected this stone for Ale Salvegode, the highly honorable temple priest. Ale's sons raised this mound in memory of their father, and his wife for her husband; but Sote cut the runes for his master. May Thor consecrate these runes!"

"Whoever removes this stone to raise it over another or injures it will be required to make good the damage." Wimmer, 369.

"Rolf raised this stone in memory of Gudmund, his brother's son, and his men, who were drowned at sea. Aweir cut the runes." *Ibid.*, 346.

[38] Pipping, Hugo, *Om Runinskrifterna på de Nyfunna Ardre-Stenarna.*

Fig. 30. Pictorial Monumental Rune Stone. (From Pipping's *Ardre-Stenarna*)

runes on both sides. A common motif was the figure of a dragon or snake, arranged along the edge for a border; and between the parallel lines forming this animal the runes were cut. In the inclosed space were often elaborate twisted animal designs, figures of the gods in relief, or illustrations of scenes from Northern mythology. The later, more finely-engraved samples of stone work at times had the background filled in with color, particularly red, in order that the bas-relief design might stand out more distinctly;[39] and occasionally the runic inscriptions themselves were painted red with a similar aim (Fig. 50).[40]

Rune-Stones Placed Within the Grave

Not infrequently, runic stones were placed within the grave itself; but these were smaller than the ones erected upon the mound, and bore only the name of the deceased, with perhaps a magical sentence. In the last part of the heathen period these small stones appear to have been more commonly used than the larger monumental ones.[41] Their aim was perhaps merely personal to the one with whom they were buried; they were intended to aid him on his journey to the land of the shades and to be of service after his arrival.

Wood at times took the place of stone as grave-markers in regions where stone was scarce, or when those having charge of the disposal of the dead were in a hurry. In the latter case, a pillar of wood—usually made from the trunk of a tree—was set up; and upon it was cut a short inscription, often only the name of the person buried beneath.[42]

[39] Klintberg, M., *Några Anteckningar om Gotland i Verkligheten och Gotland i Skrift*, 108.

[40] Pipping, *Om Runinskrifterna.*

[41] Wimmer, *Die Runenschrift*, 306–309, 312.

[42] Ibn-Fadlan, 21.

Property of the Dead

The property left by the dead was disposed of in various ways. If it was entirely in the form of movables, as was often true of the possessions of the merchants who traveled and trafficked with foreign peoples, it was divided into three parts, one to go to surviving relatives, another to be buried with the corpse, and a third to be devoted to the expense of the memorial feast which followed the funeral.[43] The three divisions were of varying proportions, for the fraction of the property used for the two last-named purposes was determined by the piety and devotion of the surviving relatives and friends, their regard for public opinion, and the thoroughness with which they believed that the spirit of the departed, if wronged, would return to secure revenge. The division of the part remaining after honor had been shown to the dead was made according to custom and law, which, however, varied in different sections.

Much attention was paid by the laws, however, to landed property. In Denmark if a married man died his wife could inherit the whole of his land only if the two had had children. The woman became the heir of her husband through her children; but eventually the property descended to the children. If the pair was childless, half of the land went to the parents of the deceased. The law applied in the same way if the wife died leaving land.[44] In general, however, if there were grown sons, landed property went quite directly into their control when the father died. In Western Scandinavia, if there was only one piece of land, this appears to have gone to the eldest son; but if there were several tracts, one or more went to each male heir.[45] However,

[43] *Ibid.*, 11. [44] *Kong Eriks Sjellandske Lov*, 2–3.
[45] Steenstrup, *Danmarks Historie*, I, 253–255.

in Iceland two sons were at times made joint heirs of a single farm.

In the early part of the viking period the daughter was probably shut out from any claim upon her father's land even in the absence of sons; but in Iceland during the last part of the tenth century a daughter under these circumstances became her father's heir.[46] However, it was not until two hundred years later that the inheritance laws of the North began to place daughters on an equality with sons.[47] Before this, they appear to have generally received one third of the father's possessions, while their brothers received the remaining two thirds.[48] Yet, the injustice to the daughters was perhaps usually more apparent than real; for most women of ancient Scandinavia married, and the dowries settled upon them by their fathers were as a rule considerably larger than the amount given to the sons to enable them to fulfill their contracts as grooms. This fact tended to produce equalization of values in property distribution. Furthermore, often when the othal land went to the son, the daughter inherited a larger share of movable goods.[49]

The Arval, Grave-Ale, or Funeral Feast

Throughout Scandinavia it was customary for the surviving friends or kindred to hold a grave-ale or funeral feast in honor of the deceased shortly after the remains had been put out of the way. This banquet to the dead is one of the most characteristic features of funerals among primitive peoples, and in the famous "wake" it exists at the present time among the Irish. In some parts the feast could not lawfully be held until after the seventh day following the death; and it was often post-

[46] *Njála*, 45.
[47] Bugge, *Vesterlandenes Indflydelse*, 53.
[48] *Valdemar den Andens Jydske Lov*, 14.
[49] Wisén, Theodor, *Om Qvinnan i Nordens Forntid*, 14.

poned until the thirtieth. If the deceased was father of the family, the preparations were likely to be particularly elaborate. Occasionally, memorial feasts for several persons were held at the same time and place;[50] and in such cases large gatherings of friends and relatives were present. But great crowds once in a while assembled to do honor to a single individual, as in the case of Shelty, the Icelander, to whose grave-ale his sons invited more than fourteen hundred guests. This number was unusually large, however, for the saga account states that this was "the noblest arval ever held in Iceland."[51] The grave-ale often lasted for several days, and was usually characterized by much drinking, particularly to the memory of the dead, whom the guests were duty-bound thus to honor.[52] Presumably, however, none of the friends or relatives ever regarded such an obligation as very arduous. The character and accomplishments of the departed were also extolled by members of the gathering; one gifted in saga-telling recited in prose his great deeds, or a skald composed and sang songs in his praise.[53]

Assumption of Heirship

The grave-ale was not only a memorial to the dead but also a ceremonial, installing the living into the rights of heirship. Such an installation always took place if the heir was a grown son. At the opening of the banquet, the "high seat" of the late master of the household stood vacant, and thus it remained while the guests did him honor in the ways just mentioned. But as soon as the son had finished drinking the horn of memory to his father, he stepped forward and placed himself in the seat, by this act assuming formal possession of the property left by the

[50] *Saga Library*, III, 271.
[51] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 141.
[52] Ibn-Fadlan, 11; *Saga Library*, III, 271.
[53] *Origines Islandicae*, I, 141, 205.

deceased and inaugurating himself into the headship of the household.[54] Thus was signalized in the ancient Northland the passing of the old generation from the stage and the entrance of the new upon it.

[54] Keyser, *Private Life of the Old Northmen*, 175–177.

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